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THE

BANKER'S WIFE;

OR,

Court and City.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF

"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "MRS. ARMYTAGE," &c., &c.

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THE BANKER'S WIFE;

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COURT AND CITY.

CHAPTER I.

Scenes form'd for contemplation, and to nurse
The growing seeds of wisdom, that suggest,
By every pleasing image they present,
Reflections such as meliorate the heart.

COWPER.

A LOVER of the picturesque, whether poet, painter, or simply an enjoyer of Nature's works, may be justified, perhaps, in extending his quest after the sublime and beautiful beyond the limits of the rich but monotonous landscapes of Old England. But, while the indented shores of Naples or cloud-capt mountains of Switzerland attract these dreamy wanderers to fill their albums and sketch-books with sonnets in sixteen lines, or daubings in bistre and cobalt, a notable counter-charm is produced on the minds of foreign tourists in our own country by the neatness, order, and fertility of our rural districts.

Scarcely a county but boasts its series of cheerful villages and aristocratic residences, from the stately Gothic hall of earlier centuries to the commodious family mansion of modern times, surrounded by spreading parks and trimly gardens; nor is it easy to travel ten miles in England without passing the lodge-gates of some private domain, unmentioned save in the obscure annals of county-history, which, if the summer residence of some German principicule, would be signalized to tourists with all the descriptive pomp of a guide-book, or the onerous eloquence of the *valet de place*.

If, for instance, as a stranger in the land, you stop to dine or sleep at the little country inn of Ovington, and inquire of mine host of the Burlington Arms whether the neighbourhood contain any object of interest, he will answer, with a stultified look, that there is "nothing thereabouts worth speaking on."

"There's the Hyde, an old place as 'longs to the Vernon family; and Squire Hamlyn's, at Dean Park; besides, sir, Rudger Burlinton's farther up along the river; but none on 'em show-places; and the gentry as likes to visit grand houses be forced to cut across the country, to Burleigh, or Belvoir."

Nevertheless, these three domains—the Hyde, Burlington Manor, and Dean Park—are severally citable as models of rural beauty; the neighbourhood which, within a circle of fifteen miles, comprehends the three properties in question, affording a favourable type of that rich and smiling order of home-landscape which seems almost to imbody a portraiture of our social institutions: nothing salient—nothing discordant—a limited horizon—a pleasant foreground, with symbols of peace and prosperity interposing between, and abundant evergreens to plant out the offices, in order to gratify the taste of those who care less whether Lazarus be sitting famished and suffering at their gates, than that the gates should be of sufficient solidity to exclude the spectacle of so piteous an object.

The parish of Ovington is, in short, a beautiful country; watered by a fine river, prospered by a fertile soil, unmolested by commercial speculation, undisturbed by factories, unvulgarized by villas; a country such as George Robins would have delighted to describe in his largest capitals and most sonorous periods, had either of the noble mansions in question fallen, at any moment, under the branding-iron of his pen or hammer.

At the period to which the reader's attention is humbly requested, the fairest of these estates had of late narrowly escaped this degrading contingency. For nearly a year it had remained an undecided point among the executors of the late Sir Roger Burlington, whether Burlington Manor should be sold outright, to pay off the mortgages on the Yorkshire property of his son (a minor, scarcely past the age of infancy), or whether the place should be let on lease for a term of twenty-one years.

The latter alternative carried the day; thanks, as it was believed, to the advocacy of the most zealous of the guardians, Mr. Hamlyn of Dean Park, whose estate adjoined, and who was supposed to tremble at the idea of seeing the Burlington property fall into the hands of some moneyed speculator, disposed to turn to account the facilities of the fine stream traversing the two properties. A respectable and quiet neighbour, secured by his own interference, was a most important object to him; and it was probably an argument of some weight with his co-executors and trustees, that, precisely at the right moment, he was able to produce the one man needful, in the person of a wealthy colonel of the East India Company's Engineering Service, recently returned from Bombay.

Richard Hamlyn was one of those fortune-favoured individuals who seem born with a knack for producing the right thing at the right moment. Though qualified by the innkeeper of Ovington as "'Squire Hamlyn," there was little enough of the "'Squire" in the estated proprietor of Dean Park. He was simply a London banker; a cold, methodical, prudent man, taking as much pride in his country-seat as the engrossing nature of a thriving business allowed him to take in anything out of Lombard-street, but eager, as a matter of interest, to secure his property against the deterioration of manufacturing innovation. With the terror of steam-engines or spinning-jennies before his eyes, it was a

comfort, indeed, to find such a man as his friend Colonel Hamilton established, for the rest of his life, at Burlington Manor.

The new tenant had been for years a valued constituent of the banking-house of Hamlyn and Co., and, on arriving in England, it was to Richard, the acting partner, his correspondent for twenty years past, that he addressed himself, as a friend and counsellor, in matters even of more personal interest than the investment of his lacs of rupees.

Though he had passed nearly half a century in banishment, Colonel Hamilton had been driven home from India several years before the epoch he had mentally fixed for his return—the completion of a fortune of four hundred thousand pounds!—by the loss of his wife, and a severe illness (the first in his life) consequent upon this heartfelt bereavement. But the moment he set foot on his native soil, and cast the slough engendered by a long life of slavery to Mammon, the old man became reconciled to leave the cipher of his fortune at three hundred and forty-two thousand; deciding that, at sixty-five years of age, it was better to content himself with these ample means of enjoyment; for, having outlived his two sons, who left no posterity to inherit his fine fortune, he had to choose between bequeathing his property to distant relatives, or earning a posthumous statue and newspaper renown from the gratitude of some public institution.

A London banker is not the man to refuse his friendship or advice to an heirless old gentleman, with a floating capital of hundreds of thousands. Cold and mechanical as were Mr. Hamlyn's habits of life, he put himself almost out of his way to seek a suitable London residence for Colonel Hamilton, the moment he began to complain of the hot rooms and cold mulligatawny of the hotel in the Adelphi to which he had resorted on his arrival, as the only one still extant which he remembered as a boy. Many were "the substantial town mansions" which Mr. Hamlyn commended to the notice of the nabob for the remainder of the season. But the old gentleman, with his over-brimming purse and indefinite purposes, like a sailor returned from a cruise in a hurry to get rid of his prize-money, was determined to purchase. As if he could not make too much haste in securing himself a footing in his native country, he concluded a hasty bargain for a commodious house in Portland Place, and for some weeks amused himself and enriched the upholsterers by the effort of furnishing.

But no sooner was all arranged on what appeared to his friends the Hamlyns the most comfortable and liberal footing, than the colonel, for want of farther occupation, began to grumble. Day after day did he make his appearance at their house in Cavendish Square, with some complaint against the climate or customs of the metropolis!

Luckily, he was far from a peevish grumbler. He was a laughing rather than a crying philosopher; and bantered his own fastidiousness so good-humouredly, that Mrs. Hamlyn, to whom, during the absence of her husband in the city, his complaints were usually confided, was far more amused than wearied by his Chapter of Lamentations.

"Between ourselves, my good lady," said he, after ensconcing himself in an armchair by the fireside one gloomy morning in January, when the leafless trees in Cavendish Square looked as grim and ghastly through the fog as the spectral forms of Ossian's heroes, "between ourselves, I own myself plaguily disappointed in this Lon'on of yours! The first few days in any country are a sad take in, more especially in one's native land, after fifty years' absence. The excitement of finding one's self among fellow-creatures of one's own creed and complexion, and hearing spoken around one the language of one's boyhood—the language in which one's parents pronounced their blessing on one's head at parting—is apt to bring tears into one's eyes that blind them to other matters. At first I thought I could never see enough of busy, prosperous Lon'on; and I vow to my Maker there were moments when I could have found it in my heart to kneel down and kiss the sooty earth under my feet (old blockhead that I was!), because it was that of Old England. But, at a week's end, ma'am, I began to see clearer. After I'd been knocked about a bit, and jeered by the Cockneys every time I ventured to ask a question, or put my nose out of doors in a coat or waistcoat differing in cut from those of the weekly fashion-mongers, I recognised the folly of giving way to such warm emotions among a race of folks who dare not yield to a single natural impulse, from fear of what their finer neighbours may be thinking of 'em!"

"It is true, the forms of social life are somewhat rigidly maintained among us," observed the banker's wife, stitching placidly on at her monotonous carpet-work.

"Rigidly, indeed, for a country that calls itself the Land of Liberty!" retorted the old colonel. "I'd as soon live in a waxwork show as among such stuffed puppets as this sort of formality engenders—men in buckram—men in armour—that is, men of straw! Your good husband (who has my interests at heart as if they were his own) finds me a mighty stubborn scholar, I fancy, in the grand art of modern politeness!"

"Mr. Hamlyn has, I am sure, sincere pleasure in any little service he may be able to render you!" replied his companion, without raising her eyes from her work.

"I believe you—I really believe you; only we differ, maybe, in our notions of service. My friend Hamlyn thinks it a matter of kindness to be always setting me right about little idle, empty, fussy ceremonies of society, concerning which, 'tween you and I, my dear ma'am, I care not a button! When I propose anything he thinks out of the common, by way of making those about me comfortable or myself happy, he's sure to remind me that 'such is not the custom of this country,' or, that ''tis contrary to the usages of the world.' Bless your heart! I've lived too long where the usages of the world were of no account, to submit patiently to the thraldom of a network of copper-lace and spangles! God forbid I should behave myself like a Hottentot. But I can't fancy that Hamlyn's favourite 'world' would have gone on a jot the worse had you brought your girls to dine with me on Tuesday, or if I'd persisted in giving up my back parlour for the use of my man Johnston and his wife, who in Indy were not used to mope away their days in cellars!"

"But you have such a capital housekeeper's room in Portland Place," remonstrated Mrs. Hamlyn, subdued by the force of habit into unquestioning acquiescence in the opinions of her

husband. "With respect to my daughters, as Mr. Hamlyn mentioned to you before, they are not out. Lydia is little more than sixteen, her sister two years younger. Both are still in the schoolroom. They do not even dine at our own table."

"So much the worse, ma'am, so much the worse; one of the very things I complain of! Little more than sixteen, indeed! Why, in Indy she'd be a wife by this time, perhaps a mother. And not allowed to share the meals of her parents? not permitted to dine with her father's old friend? Always with the governess—always at her studies! What's the use of such excess of edication for young ladies, pray, unless to teach 'em to play their parts prettily in society? And how the deuse is a girl ever to learn to become a woman, if excluded from the company of gentlemen and ladies till, without knowing her cue, the curtain suddenly draws up, and she finds herself alone upon the stage?"

"The late hours Mr. Hamlyn is obliged to keep," observed the banker's wife, careful not to admit how far more closely her ideas of happiness and propriety agreed with those of the warm-hearted colonel than those of her austere husband, "would scarcely be advantageous to the girls. With respect to having declined your kind invitation, had they dined in Portland Place, my own family, which is numerous, would have claimed the same exception in their favour."

"Ay, ay, ay! it all sounds mighty plausible and Mrs. Goodchild-ish!" interrupted the colonel, shrugging his shoulders. "But the long and the short of these wise regulations is, that such rule-and-compass work in the bosom of families is making away with everything like warmth of feeling, and shrivelling up social interest into a manual of etiquette. Household happiness is too joyous a thing, ma'am, to be worked by steam. I vow to my Maker I'd as soon live in a penitentiary, and be rung in to meals and exercise like a felon, as be cramped up eternally in my loves and likings by a code of heartless decorum."

"I trust your kind feelings towards my girls are not likely to be cramped by the methodical habits of the family?" observed Mrs. Hamlyn, with a smile.

"That's more than I'll take upon me to say. What will those poor children ever care about *me*, pray, whom they're called away from their forte-piano once a week to courtesy to, and hope I'm well, and whom they never see in the exercise of human charities? I'm disappointed, my dear ma'am—I'm sadly disappointed! I've no family left of my own, the more's the pity; and, being fond of young people, 'twas a comfort to me, in returning to this country, to think of surrounding myself with innocent, happy faces—if not those of my own kith and kin, at least the kith and kin of my friends. And what's the end on't? I vow to my Maker I was not more lonesome in my bungalow at Ghazerapore, than in my fine, showy, comfortable, comfortless house in Portland Place! Most of my acquaintance in Lon'on are men of business, tied down to their occupations; and as to the ladies, my friend Hamlyn gave me a broad hint t'other night, over our claret, that 'tisn't the custom of what *he* calls the world for gentlemen to indulge in *too* frequent morning calls—"

"Be assured," interrupted Mrs. Hamlyn, for once raising her eyes from her work, "that my husband intended no allusion to his *own* house or family in the prohibition."

"I know it, my dear good lady, I know it. If you'd allowed me to finish my sentence, I was going to add, 'except in the case of so warm a friendship and intimacy as unites ourselves.' And so you see the consequence of this last piece of schooling of Hamlyn's will be to trouble you twice as often with my company. He well knows you are the only folks in Lon'on with whom I'm on anything like a friendly footing; and at the snail's-pace rate at which acquaintances are made in this confounded foggy metropolis, I shall have leisure to die and be catacombed in one or t'other of the new cemeteries, long afore I've brought myself to more than a distant bow with my next-door neighbours."

"The vast extension of society in London," observed Mrs. Hamlyn, her habitual serenity unruffled by the vehemence of her companion, "has necessitated a degree of caution in the formation of intimacy which, to persons habituated to the sociability of a colony, may appear coldness and reserve. But an intimacy, once created, soon ripens into friendship; and the friendship, once really matured, ripens and brings forth fruit, an inheritance from generation to generation."

"So much the better for those who've patience to wait so long. But *my* heart's not like an aloe, my dear ma'am, that wants a hundred years to bring it into bloom; and I've learned, to my cost, that a winter in Lon'on (which in Indy we're apt to fancy the summum bonum of human sociability) is about as cheerful a thing as a judgeship two thousand miles up the country, or a solitary detachment in the Ghaûts."

"Winter is generally admitted to be an unsociable moment in London," said Mrs. Hamlyn, quietly. "Most people who have family seats spend their Christmas in the country. This is the first winter *I* have passed in town for the last ten years."

"And how *came* you to pass it here?" demanded the matter-of-fact old gentleman.

Mrs. Hamlyn was busy picking up her scissors, and did not hear. But the colonel, who seldom asked questions except with the view of obtaining information, reiterated his interrogation.

"Mr. Hamlyn fancied, I believe," replied the lady, thus forced to an ungracious explanation, "that you would find it dull if left in town without a single family of your acquaintance."

Grateful conviction glistened in Colonel Hamilton's eyes as he replied: "And so, then, you're all doing penance in Lon'on for my sake? That was mons'ously kindly thought of on Hamlyn's part," added he, after a moment's consideration. "To be sure, if dull and lonesome *now*, I should have been fit to hang myself when you were all off to Warwickshire. Poor girls!—poor young ladies, I should have said—I understand *now* why Miss Lydia complained to me t'other day of the tediousness of parading, morning after morning, round and round yonder square like a squirrel in a cage. But I didn't guess, poor little lady, that *I* was the cause of moping her up, away from her pony and her country pleasures. Well! I shall always think 'twas a mons'ous friendly sacrifice on the part of Hamlyn."

"My husband is not able to enjoy much of his time at Dean Park," replied the veracious wife. "He can seldom spare more than an oc-

casional Saturday and Sunday, and a week or two at Easter and Christmas."

"And why the deuse couldn't he take me with him, then, to spend Christmas in the country?"

"I heard him speak of your having important business to wind up at the India House."

"True—very true! Hamlyn's such a steady, thoughtful dog, where business is concerned!"

"Mr. Hamlyn fancied, too, you might be disinclined to move, so shortly after settling yourself in your charming house in Portland Place."

"My dear lady, I should be mighty glad to turn my back on my *charming* house in Portland Place! To tell you the honest truth, I'm sick to death of the sight of those eternal damask curtains and rosewood tables! What interest have I in Lon'on? I care for nobody, and nobody cares for *me*. I look out at my windows half the day, like a chained dog from its kennel, at the houses of my opposite neighbours, whose very names I don't know from Adam, except in the Court Guide, and who'd think me an impertinent old fellow if I chucked their little ones under the chin on meeting them in my morning's walk!"

Mrs. Hamlyn uttered a civil sort of half-dissentient murmur.

"And when evening draws on, and my house is shut in for the night," resumed the colonel, "with nobody but poor Pincher and me to keep each other company, I sometimes ask myself what crime I've committed to be thus condemned to a solitary cell, and whether I'm really at home, and really in the Old England that calls itself so hospitable!"

"You are surely dwelling on the *dark* side of the picture, my dear sir!" said Mrs. Hamlyn.

"I wish you'd show me the bright one. Such desperate long evenings! Spin out one's dinner and one's claret as one will, they *can't* last forever; and though Johnston reads the Courier over to me once, and I read it to myself all over again the moment he goes down to supper, I've a hard matter to make it out till bedtime. If it wasn't a shame to rouse poor Goody Johnston out of her armchair, I should sometimes send for *her* to make my tea; but as to taking out servants and horses in such weather, for half an hour's gossip or whist at my club, I haven't the heart to do it—and that's the truth."

"But why not spend your evenings with *us*?" demanded Mrs. Hamlyn, in all sincerity.

"Why, so I do, as often as my conscience will allow. I'm aware, of course, that poor Hamlyn would far rather enjoy his leisure undisturbed, with his wife and family, than be taken up at backgammon, night after night, by a tiresome old fellow, always pumping him for news, and with none to offer in return. Why, my dear ma'am! even Quiddle, the apot'cary, shirks me, when I lay an embargo on him more than twice a week! Though I make the most of my rheumatics, purely to secure half an hour's chit-chat with him of an afternoon—when I try to coax him into stopping dinner, forsooth, he puts on a demure, family-man-ish sort of face, and tells me, 'Mrs. Q. is expecting him at home!'"

Mrs. Hamlyn inclined her face closer over her work to conceal an involuntary smile at this desolate picture of the situation of a man of fifteen thousand a year, thrown over by an uxorious apothecary. But scarcely had the smile arisen ere it subsided to sadness. Well did she remember the time when, on her translation from her own cheerful home to the cold, formal household of the banker in Cavendish Square, she felt nearly as lonely as the old Indian. Habit had become second nature to her. She was now tamed down into apathy by the long, uneventful mornings, and taciturn *tête-à-têtes* completing the day; and though few women would have more enjoyed unrestrained intercourse with her children, she had long resigned herself to the methodical order imposed by the banker, of seeing them at stated periods decreed by the wisdom of the head-nurse and governess, so as not to interfere with the clockwork arrangements of their meals, exercise, and education. For the rigid man of business, accustomed to regard regularity as the mainspring of affairs, carried his system of arithmetical exactitude into all the details of private life. Profound sympathy arose accordingly in the bosom of Mrs. Hamlyn, as she reflected how thoroughly she had subdued *her* impulses of feeling, and silenced her own repinings; while the gray-headed man before her, though his threescore years were accomplished, had his lesson yet to learn.

"I cannot help fearing, my dear sir," she observed, at the close of a few moments' silence, "that you have been precipitate in settling in town. In the country, the bond of good neighbourship still subsists. In the country, you would have found interests in your property to occupy your time. I sadly fear you will never be quite happy in town."

"By George, I'm beginning to think so too!" cried Colonel Hamilton; "though, to be sure, in Indy, the thing I used to dread most for my old age was the seclusion of a lonesome country-house. Between ourselves, my dear ma'am, I've had enough and to spare of my own company. Mine has been a curious life. I married for love. I'll tell you the whole story some day or another, when I'm in better spirits: suffice it now that I married for love. Nothing very wonderful in *that*, you'll say; but you may perhaps account it worth mention that thirty years of wedded life didn't lessen the mutual affection which first instigated the imprudence. Mary and I had but one head and heart between us. We lived in a remote district, wholly out of reach of society, and so never fretted after it, or anything else. No little mortifications or heart-burnings to create unkind feelings on either side; no meddlesome friends to make mischief; nobody to confide in but each other; nobody to dress for, talk for, think for, feel for, pretend for, but each other. Life lay plain and straight afore us. All our object was to be frugal and grow rich as quick as we could, that we might return to our native country, and enjoy ourselves with our children.

"We had four—poorthings!—who were packed off to Europe to be reared and edicated, which was our only trouble. But there was no remedy, and people soon reconcile themselves to what is irremediable. Mary and I loved each other only the more when thus left alone together. Our two girls died young: one of 'em on her passage home, the other a year or two afterward. But the boys throve and prospered; and a great joy it was to their mother and me to watch the progress of the fortune which, some day or other, was to make us all happy and comfortable together. I had a fine appointment. In those days, ma'am, the pagoda-tree hadn't

been shaken too roughly, and there were still ways and means whereby an honest man might make a princely fortune in Indy, and Indy none the worse for't. I had the roads and tanks of a whole district to create; and was lucky enough to create myself, at the same time, a prime favourite with the rajah.

"Like an ass as I was, however, the first hundred thousand pounds I had the luck to scrape together, I deposited with a company of native merchants; and when Mrs. Hamilton and I, moderate in our desires, determined to come home and rejoin our children, these fellows, though not in a state of insolvency, were so situated that to realize my funds was impossible. So I was even forced to stay and look after them. Fortunately, my roads and tanks wanted looking after too. By way of compensation, the rajah doubled my salary from the company, and so my fortune went on increasing and increasing, and as the appetite for money is said to increase by what it feeds on, *we* only grew the more sparing for growing richer. By this time, I'd opened an account with my friend Hamlyn, who strongly advised my remaining on the spot to mount guard over my coffee-coloured debtors. And why not? Mary and I were as happy together as the day was long."

"And while your sons remained at school, even in England, you could have enjoyed little of their society," interposed Mrs. Hamlyn.

"The voyage home, too, was a serious matter in those days; so, having determined to stay in Indy, so long as there was any necessity for return, we dawdled on from year to year, happy in ourselves, and still happier in the thought of settling in our old age in our native country, in the bosom of our family—see the boys prosper in their turn, marry, and settle. But what a selfish old blockhead I am, to trouble you with all these details, in which you can take no manner of interest!" cried the old man, suddenly checking himself, as a warm tear, stealing down his face, rendered him painfully conscious of the presence of his companion.

"Go on, I entreat you," faltered Mrs. Hamlyn, in a tone of unfeigned interest and compassion.

"The rest, my dear good lady, you know pretty well as near as myself," resumed the colonel. "You *knew* my poor sons. When they were schoolboys—when Jack was at Eton, and Bob at Haileybury, they used to write us word of the happy holydays they enjoyed at Dean Park. Thanks to you and Hamlyn, the poor fellows never felt the want of a home. When they grew to man's estate, Bob, instead of accepting the fine appointment offered me for him by the Company, chose to go into the army. But Jack—*poor* Jack!—finding I had determined to remain in exile half a dozen years longer, resolved to come out to Indy (bless him for the thought!), to have a sight of his old father and mother. He never *did* see 'em, ma'am! The unfortunate vessel—"

"Spare yourself, my dear sir!" interrupted Mrs. Hamlyn. "The fate of poor dear John Hamilton was as deeply deplored by our fireside as by your own."

"Poor lad! poor lad! To judge by his letters, as fine a fellow as ever breathed God's air. His mother never held up her head again. She survived for years, but *never* held up her head again after the fatal news reached us. His brother—"

"His brother married—"

"Ay, but not till we'd committed the fatal mistake of fretting his heart and health out by opposition to his marriage. In that, my friend Hamlyn was a wee bit to blame. Hamlyn seemed to think that it was because I had yielded at a word to Robert's whim about the army, he now presumed on his influence to threaten me with a foolish marriage. As if parents, thousands of miles off, have any right to control the affections of an only son, grown to man's estate, and the best judge of his own tastes and inclinations! But all that might have been predicted came to pass. Though at first as positive as a Turk, I gave way the moment I heard the boy's health was failing. *Too* late, my dear madam, too late—too late! He married (as you know, for you were present, I fancy, at the wedding), and went straight to Italy, and died within the year. If he had only left a child to comfort his parents in their old age—if he had *only* left a child! Well, ma'am, the moment the news of his sudden death reached us, we resolved to hurry home—an odd fancy, you'll think, just then, when we had nothing left to care for in England. But our only object had been to lay by a fortune for the boys. Both were gone! What or *who* was there now left in the world, to induce us to remain estranged from our native country? Mary was a confirmed invalid; but I cheered her up with hopes that native air would restore her—that there were bright days in store for us yet. Poor Mary! She smiled, and pretended to believe me, not liking to *seem* to reproach me for having occasioned the death of her son!"

"I well remember receiving the letter from Mrs. Hamilton, announcing her return," said Mrs. Hamlyn, in a low voice, "and thanking me for a lock of her son's hair. Her only desire in this world, she said, was to be laid beside him in the grave."

"Did she say *that?*" cried the old man, wiping his eyes. "Good creature! She never expressed the wish to *me;* feeling, I dare say, that it was fated to be ungratified! Her passage home was taken, however; and, thanks to Johnston and his wife, every comfort provided. But it wouldn't do. The word had gone forth—God had called her to himself!"

"I laid her in the grave," resumed Colonel Hamilton, in a voice broken by sobs. "My companion for thirty years—my companion, I may say, in the wilderness, with whom I had never exchanged one angry word or resentful feeling! Poor Mary! My grief for *her* was very different from what I had felt for the boys. *That* she had been there to alleviate! But everything went with *her*—everything—everything!"

Mrs. Hamlyn respected in silence the grief of the good old man. At length she ventured to congratulate him on having been able, at a crisis so grievous, to turn his back on the scene of his trials.

"Your afflictions would have been doubly painful," said she, "had circumstances compelled you to remain in India."

"I don't know—I often think otherwise," was his reply. "It seemed like losing sight of all my happier recollections, to turn my back on the place where we had abided together. The old house and gardens at Ghaznapore were full of *her*. *There* had our children been born to us—*there* had I wiped the last moisture from her face. My poor dear wife! The natives adored

her; she was a second Providence in the village. Here, no one ever heard her name. I spoke of her one day to Quiddle—spoke of her as I am speaking now, and the jackass told me I was *low*, and advised a dose of sal-volatile! However, 'twas by her express desire I hastened home.

"'You owe it to yourself and others,' said poor Mrs. Hamilton, on her deathbed, 'to extend your sphere of usefulness to the best of your means. We have lived, my dear husband, solely for ourselves and our children, and Heaven seems to have visited this upon us as a fault. You are rich—you possess the means of doing good. Go home. Call around you those who are left, and promote their happiness and your own. Robert's widow has claims upon you. The Hamlyns, who were parents to your children, have claims upon you. Return to England, therefore, my dear, dear Hamilton, and fulfil the excellent purposes of your kindly nature!'

"At first, compliance with her parting injunctions appeared impossible," resumed the old man, after a pause of deep emotion, "and I hoped to be spared the pain of resisting, for the first time, a wish of my wife's, by following her to the grave. But people seldom die of grief, I fancy. The Almighty proportions our trials to our strength. It is in the order of nature that we survive many whom we love, and become consoled for their loss. Providence knows best!

"Before the end of the year I embarked for England. I have not been two years a widower, yet already I entertain hopes of making my old age, if not all that I once hoped and expected, at least happy and cheerful with the happiness and cheerfulness of others!"

"May your prospects be fully realized!" ejaculated Mrs. Hamlyn, her countenance bearing tokens of deep sympathy in the emotions of her honest-hearted friend. "You say right, Colonel Hamilton! Providence knows best. Very, *very* few among us are fated to be happy in the way we should have pointed out in early youth as the path of happiness, yet scarcely a human being but—"

She paused. At that moment the drawing-room door was slowly opened, and the rising colour on her cheek, and words suspended on her lips, denoted Mrs. Hamlyn's instantaneous recognition of the noiseless approach of her husband.

Colonel Hamilton, without rising from the armchair beside the fire, where he felt himself so thoroughly at home, extended his hand in cordial greeting to his friend Hamlyn, the banker.

CHAPTER II.

Lord Angelo is precise—scarcely confesses
His appetite is more to bread than stone.

SHAKSPEARE.

RICHARD HAMLYN was what is called a most excellent man—a man generally esteemed and respected—a man eminently qualified to figure to advantage on a tombstone; had never been suspected of a vice, or accused of a failing. Not a servant in his establishment, most of whom had lived with him for years, could complain of having seen his countenance disturbed by anger, or heard his voice raised by excitement.

Such, however, was the force of his calm and immutable regularity, that the most fiery domestic tyrant could not have attained a more absolute sway in his own family. His wife knew him to be averse to all display of sensibility; his children were early taught that he detested noise; and the banker's house was, consequently, characterized by the silence, coldness, and dulness of the Great Pyramid.

Impossible to see a better regulated establishment! All went as if by clockwork or steam. Whether the perfection of its household-management arose from perseverance in method or readiness of means, the result was admirable. Had any friend of Hamlyn's, after an absence of many years in the far East or far West, thought proper to drop in to dinner in Cavendish Square, or volunteer a visit to Dean Park, he might have been as certain of the hour and the minute to arrive, the number of dishes on the table and servants in attendance, the disposition of the salvers on the sideboard and decanters on the board, as though he had only vacated his seat in the dining-room the preceding day. But, on the other hand, people of Richard Hamlyn's class seldom possess a friend *sufficiently* friendly to drop in to dinner, or volunteer a visit in the country.

His wife, when, at eighteen, in all her bloom of beauty and cheerfulness of spirit, she accepted the proposals of a handsome young man with whom she had danced through the London season, certainly expected a very different personage in the gay son of a wealthy banker, on whom her parents were so eager to bestow her hand. But scarcely a year after their marriage, the death of the elder Hamlyn, while it assigned independence to the young couple, threw the business of the family and the firm so completely into the hands of the bridegroom as to sober him at once into a man of business.

From that moment Mrs. Hamlyn lost sight of her husband in the banker and executor; and as her mother-in-law continued till her death, some years afterward, to reside with them in Cavendish Square and at Dean Park, Richard Hamlyn had no scruple about leaving his wife alone, and devoting himself exclusively to business. In the city he thenceforth lived, and moved, and had his being. His dreams were of clerkly desks, his visions of loans and Exchequer bills; and when, at the end of the week, he hurried down in summer into the country, or, at the close of the day in winter, retired to his London fireside, he arrived there so jaded in spirits by the pressure of his arduous concerns, that it was clear his idea of domestic happiness must consist in tranquillity. The greatest proof of kindness his wife could show him was to leave him silent and alone.

It is surprising how readily the tact of a woman attached to her duties suggests the surest mode of recommending herself to the affections of her husband. The merry, thoughtless Sophia soon saw that, to endear herself to the man of business, she must offer no obstruction to the methodical serenity of one who had not leisure for demonstrations of sensibility, or the frivolous pastimes of life. Punctual and acquiescent, she must receive him ever with a smile, seldom with a laugh. By degrees, the smile subsided into a thoughtful gravity still more acceptable. At thirty, Mrs. Hamlyn had sunk into a mild.

calm, silent woman, without a vestige of the buoyancy of youth; and the banker into a stiff, reserved man of business—after the fashion of most conjugal couples in the money-getting classes of Great Britain.

Had this sobriety of deportment been a matter of calculation, it could not have prospered better! Richard Hamlyn was the very mirror of bankers—the model-man of Lombard-street! His father's city contemporaries nodded their heads approvingly while remarking that Richard was a steady, exemplary young man—his wife a very prudent young woman; and though their household and modes of life were established on a footing of almost aristocratic liberality, no one was disposed to find fault. So capital was young Hamlyn's management, that even the most captious of his constituents was fain to admit that the far-sighted financier of Lombard-street and Dean Park was able to make half a sovereign go as far as a guinea.

Children, meanwhile, had been born to the prosperous couple; and the same system of discipline which had converted the gay Sophia Harrington into a domestic machine, rendered the little Hamlyns the mildest and dullest children in the world. Untaught by the example of others to be capricious or noisy (for the faults of children are far more imitative than grown-up people are apt to allow), they appeared to be as much under the control of the omnipitent banker as any other of his ciphers.

This unlimited submission on the part of those about him, exercised, by degrees, an evil influence on the character of Richard Hamlyn. In his own quiet way, he was as absolute as the sultan. He did not understand the slightest opposition to his veto; and though, having succeeded his father in the representation of the neighbouring borough of Barthorpe, his opinions commanded the respect of the House of Commons on all questions of commercial or financial interest, Hamlyn, the banker, had more than once committed himself in Parliament by outbursts of petulance singularly at variance with the gentle tenour of his private life. In his country neighbourhood, on the other hand, he was respected as a just landlord and hospitable neighbour, not spending enough of his time in Warwickshire to nullify the good report of the county by the taciturn reserve of his deportment. By degrees, indeed, his temper afforded evidence in private life of the irritating stress of an anxious vocation. But Mrs. Hamlyn had either schooled herself into such apathy as to remain unconscious of the change, or was too good a woman to avow, even to herself, that she was aware of the despotic harshness of the father of her children. The concealment was easy. Like the majority of his sex, he was never arbitrary with his wife unless when they were alone.

"What were you and Colonel Hamilton discussing to-day, that I found you both so agitated when I came in?" demanded he of his wife, as they awaited together in the drawing-room the announcement of dinner on the day in question.

"He was simply describing to me the supreme happiness of his wedded life. Mrs. Hamilton and the old gentleman appear to have been a singularly united couple."

"*All* couples are said to have been *singularly* united, as soon as either husband or wife is in the grave," replied the banker, coldly. "The Hamiltons lived very well together, or their *tête-à-tête* in an obscure district in India would have been insupportable. It was their best policy to agree!"

"People do not always act from *policy*," was the mild remonstrance of Mrs. Hamlyn. "Their dispositions were amiable and well assorted."

"Their means ample, and their understanding narrow!" added the banker.

"So much the better for their happiness! They seem to have entertained no injurious ambitions," observed his wife.

Hamlyn, who was standing magisterially on the rug, with his back to the fire, fixed his eyes inquiringly upon her face. But the countenance of Sophia, though open, was sometimes difficult to decipher. The early habit of repressing her emotions into the equanimity of the Hamlyn temperament imparted a look of vagueness and absence to her eyes. Even while uttering a simple answer to a simple question, her thoughts often appeared to be wandering; and when silent, it was impossible to surmise from her countenance the nature of her reveries.

"Colonel Hamilton must have enlarged unconscionably on the merits of his late wife," resumed the banker, still scrutinizing the face of his companion; "for Ramsay told me, when I came in, he had been sitting with you more than an hour."

"Was it so long? Poor old man! his sole comfort consists in his visits here," replied Mrs. Hamlyn. "I wish the boys were in town, to enliven him with their society. But between Walter's hunting and Henry's Italian tour, we are left this winter quite alone!"

"What possible charm could the society of young men of their age have for an old fellow like Hamilton?"

"But since *you* have no leisure to bestow upon him?"

"He bestows *his* leisure upon *you*. My house is always open to him."

"Yet you seem surprised he should have been sitting here so long this morning?"

Again did Richard Hamlyn fix his eyes inquiringly on the face of his wife; but he read there no indication of an unusual bitterness of retort.

"I fear he is getting sadly weary of London," added she, with her customary gentleness. "The solitude of a crowded city, where he knows nobody, oppresses him; and Quiddle assures him that all his indigestion arises from being hypped, and recommends Brighton or Cheltenham. Colonel Hamilton is himself of opinion that London disagrees with him."

"Absurd! London is one of the most salubrious spots in the world. Portland Place lies very high, and stands upon gravel."

"His spirits, rather than his health, appear affected."

"Do you mean to say, Sophia, that London is not a sufficiently cheerful residence for a man who has been living contentedly for the last forty years, *tête-à-tête* with a valetudinarian wife, in a colony of Gentoos?"

"The very reason of his requiring a livelier residence in his old age. I almost agree with *him*," added Mrs. Hamlyn, "that he would be happier in the country."

"In short, you have been advising him to settle at Brighton or Cheltenham, where a man of *his* sort will be instantly surrounded by toadies, to the serious detriment of our children."

"I do not call Brighton or Cheltenham the country. The utmost I suggested was, that he

would have been happier with us this winter at Dean Park!"

"I told you before, that Hamilton has important business in Leadenhall-street!"

"Which will be settled in a few months. If, therefore, instead of a house in Portland Place, he had purchased Burlington Manor—"

"You might as well say, if he had purchased the Hyde or Dean Park! Burlington Manor is not on sale!"

"Yet surely you mentioned the other night—" Mrs. Hamlyn paused. It suddenly occurred to her that her husband might not choose to be reminded of what he had mentioned the other night. But she had advanced too far to recede. The banker's curiosity was excited. She was compelled to rise and explain.

"You hinted," resumed his wife, in obedience to his commands, "that Lady Burlington had resolved against living at the Manor."

"I certainly said she was apprehensive of the large expenses such a residence must entail on the minor's estate."

"At all events, you seemed of opinion that, before long, the whole place might possibly be brought to the hammer!"

Mr. Hamlyn had indeed uttered some such denunciation; but merely in the way of menace against Lady Burlington, who occasionally saw fit to have a will of her own, as co-executrix of her husband, and guardian of her son. He now seemed struck by a sudden inspiration, and was about to utter some trivial remark by way of distracting the attention of his wife from the subject, when Ramsay, his solemn butler, entered with a mysterious air to announce dinner. It was the rule of the house to avoid, during the attendance of the servants at meal-times, all conversation involving the mention of proper names; and nothing, consequently, could be more bald and disjointed than the dinner-table chat of the Hamlyn family.

On returning to the drawing-room after dinner, the same prohibitory regulations were in force, in deference to the presence of the young ladies and their governess, who made their appearance for tea. Few, therefore, and brief were the moments allotted to conjugal confidence by the banker, who, on points where it was his pleasure to maintain reserve, understood how to frustrate curiosity by an imperturbable coldness, more effective than the most intemperate warmth of other men.

The experience of four-and-twenty years, however, enabled his wife to form tolerably correct inferences even from his silence; and her interpretation of a few broken words and elevations of the eyebrow prevented her being *much* surprised, when, about a month afterward, the moment that February put forth its usual deceptive mildness, Colonel Hamilton announced one morning to Lydia and her sister that he was about to accompany their father for a day or two to Dean Park.

"Any message to your pony, Miss Lydia, my dear?" said the old man to the elder girl (towards whom he had a partial leaning, from the circumstance of his son Jack having been staying, a convalescent child from school, at Dean Park at the moment of her birth, and enlarged mightily in his letters to his mother on the beauty of the babe); "any message to the lambs and primroses on Valentine's day?"

"Going to dear Dean? How provoking! You will see the place to such advantage at this time of year!" cried Lydia. "And I was so in hopes that at your first visit *I* should be there to show you—"

She paused. The warm-hearted girl hesitated about alluding to the flower-garden made for her, in her happier childhood, by her patrons, the young Hamiltons.

"Don't fret yourself, my dear young lady!" cried Colonel Hamilton. "I shall most likely see the place in all its perfection before I die; ay, and *you* may chance to see *me* there oftener than you care for. However, mum's the word! Hamlyn's such a cautious fellow that he won't let me blab even about my own affairs."

Already Mrs. Hamlyn foresaw the result of this visit. Within a week the papers were in progress whose signature was to assign Burlington Manor to the ex-colonel of Ghazerapore.

The measure, if accomplished solely at the suggestion of the worldly-wise man in whose hands he was little more than a puppet, was one Colonel Hamilton was far less likely to repent than his own precipitate purchase in Portland Place, though even *that* evil had been remedied by the intervention of the banker, who contrived to persuade a young Irish baronet (just come into his fortune, and whom an extensive county in Ireland judged of years of sufficient discretion to represent it in Parliament), that Portland Place was an agreeable distance from the House of Commons, and six hundred a year a moderate rent.

"And so you see, my dear lady," observed Colonel Hamilton, on announcing the good news in Cavendish Square, "my friend Hamlyn's put me in the way of being comfortable: found me a house, and found me a tenant. With a degree of inconsistency I might blush for, if there were any but Pincher to admire my blushes, I've let my house to a stranger, and shall reside for the rest of my days under a stranger's roof. I'd rather have purchased—*much* rather have purchased. At my time o' life, to sign a lease for twenty-one years appears like tempting Providence. But within fifty miles of Dean, not a place to be had; and the idea of going farther away from you all would have broken my old heart. So you must even make up your minds to put up with me. We're now next-door neighbours. Our park-gates stand cheek by jowl, as it were, and we might almost shake hands over the paling!"

"We used to see a great deal of the Burlington's," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, with a saddened eye. "In poor Sir Roger's lifetime, not a day passed without our meeting. As it proved impossible for Lady Burlington to keep up the place during her son's minority, I always preferred its remaining unoccupied to seeing a stranger in the room of my friend, little expecting ever to find a tenant in yourself. *You* are nearly the only person I could have been pleased to welcome to the haunts of my lost friends."

"Thank ye, thank ye!" cried the colonel. "There's one comfort in talking to *you*. One knows you mean what you say. Otherwise, I should be afraid you were already murmuring in the depths of your heart, 'Shall I *never* get rid of this old man of the sea? Is he *always* to be strapped to my shoulders?'"

"I am sure, Colonel Hamilton, you were never afraid of an unkind word or thought from mamma!" interposed Lydia, almost angrily.

"At all events, I fancy I shall have *you* among the grumblers," replied the old man,

turning laughingly towards her; "for my friend Hamlyn has decided that, instead of your all remaining in town till the end of the season—" He paused, as if reluctant to unfold the fate impending over them.

"What have *I* to do with the London season?" said Miss Hamlyn, shrugging her shoulders. "Harriet and I want only to get out of this smoky town to our ponies and flower-gardens."

"I wish ye both joy, then! for, as I was just going to tell ye, you are all to be packed off, bag and baggage, into Warwickshire, early in May."

"This is good news indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamlyn, who, taking little pleasure in the gay world previous to the introduction of her daughter into society, experienced a happy emancipation at Dean Park from the methodical restrictions imposed by the head of the family. Though the same school-hours were observed as in town, she enjoyed the company of the girls unmolested in her drives and walks, in their intervals of recreation.

"For *my* part, I start directly," added Colonel Hamilton. "'Tis a long time since I saw the grass grow and the trees bud in my own country. Goody Johnston and her husband swear I'm not made for a country gentleman, and try to persuade me the only thing I shall care for in my new seat is watching over the wall for the Lon'on mail to go by. But, though Hamlyn accuses me of being managed by my servants, I showed 'em I was my own master, and hurried the lawyers all the more with the papers the more they grumbled. I shall soon teach 'em how merry we can make the country by cheerful hearts and open housekeeping. And, by-the-way, my dear ma'am," continued the exulting old gentleman, addressing Mrs. Hamlyn, "as I find you're in correspondence with this Lady Burlington (who must be fretting her poor heart sadly, I should think, to be forced to give up her beautiful place), I wish you'd just tell her, as such matters don't read so well in a six-and-eight-penny letter, among the whereases and forasmuches of the lawyers, that if there's any poor folks in the village she holds to having cared for, or any favourite plants in the hot-houses she'd like to give to a friend, she has only to send me a hint, and her will's as good as done. I saw a fine Newfoundland dog skulking about the offices as though he'd been used to be petted and had lost a friend, at whom Pincher chose to set up his ears 'cause I patted him on the head."

"Poor Carlo!" murmured Lydia: "Sir Roger's old favourite! he must, indeed, miss Lady Burlington."

"Well, mind and tell her he sha'n't be tied up, but have the run of the place. Carlo shall still find himself at home."

"He was too cumbersome a fellow-traveller to take with her and the children to Naples," observed Mrs. Hamlyn. "I should have been glad to give him a home at Dean, and the mare too—Lady Burlington's favourite mare—but Mr. Hamlyn was not very kindly disposed towards her at the moment of her departure, and I did not dare propose it. I fancy Lady Burlington interfered too much with his arrangements as executor."

"That's to say, I suppose, she thought what was her son's was hers, and what was her's was her own. The two best friends that ever were born seldom remain so when there's pounds, shillings, and pence to be settled between 'em. Joseph's brethren sold him into slavery; and there's many a brother left in the world who'd drive the same bargain. However, just mention, my dear ma'am, in your next letter, that the mare shall have a paddock to herself till her mistress finds a better master for her; and, but for Pincher's jealousy, Carlo will have his own way. I recollect what a twinge it gave my heart to leave behind at Ghazerapore a poor dromedary that worked the well in the garden, lest it should be ill-used after losing its master and mistress. I made up my mind to shoot it, but my hand failed."

Mrs. Hamlyn answered warmly for the gratitude of her absent friend; and six weeks afterward, on her arrival at Dean Park, had the satisfaction of finding her new neighbour in the exercise of all his good intentions, and the enjoyment of more than his expected pleasures. Moreover, as it was the object of the banker to render Colonel Hamilton as contented as possible in his new residence, he had issued papal indulgences to his family, in accordance with the old gentleman's wishes, entitling his daughters to accompany their mother whenever she dined at Burlington Manor; besides letters of dispensation to Miss Creswell, the governess, to visit her friends in Ireland for the remainder of the summer, her first leave of absence during ten year's tuition in the family.

"*This* is something like happiness, and something like home!" cried the old soldier, the first time he welcomed his Dean Park friends to his hospitable board, to meet the vicar of Ovington and his wife. "A very different thing from your ostentatious Lon'on dinner-parties, where people care for nothing but to have it said that they give better venison or more turtle, or can show off a finer service of plate than their neighbours! *This* is the England I used to dream of in Indy—green, and fresh, and sociable!"

"A pleasant refreshment, certainly, sir, to eyes long wearied by the parched sands and scanty foliage of the East," observed Dr. Markham, surprised at such warm enthusiasm on the part of an old gentleman of sixty-five; a bosom friend, moreover, of his saturnine patron, the banker.

"Ay, and a still greater relief, after being sent gravel-grinding, day after day, for exercise, among a parcel of gaudy hussies in Hyde Park!" retorted the colonel. "Just turn round your head, doctor, and look at the deer groped yonder under the beech-trees, and the gleams of sunshine flung through the drooping branches on the rich grass! Lydia, child! I won't have you laugh at the ecstasies of your old friend. I dare say you'll be calling me Peter Pastoral-by-and by. You never heard the Burlingtons, maybe, run on in praise of the place, 'cause in *them* 'twould have been ostentation. But *my* raptures are simply an expression of gratitude to God for having secured to the old useless hulk, after the storms and breakers of life, safe anchorage in a pleasant harbour at last!"

In compliance with a wish expressed by the Hamlyn girls, the colonel ordered coffee to be served in a fine conservatory built by the late Sir Roger in the centre of the flower-garden, to which he was projecting the addition of an aviary for his Bengalees; and what a relief to the whole party was that unceremonious evening—the fragrance of the gardens enhanced by a gentle dew, and their gorgeous colours subdued by

the clear-obscure of a midsummer twilight—after the formalities of Dean Park!

"Is not this pleasant and sociable, Dr. Markham?" exclaimed the happy Lydia, in all the joy of schoolroom emancipation. "We never do anything of the kind at home. Papa so much dislikes having things displaced."

"Ay, ay!" interrupted the colonel, "all that sort of household subordination 's a capital thing for a family-man like my friend Hamlyn. But discipline would be out of place in an establishment with an old Indian at its head, accustomed to take things as he finds 'em, too glad to find 'em at all. I like everybody to be free, easy, and comfortable about me—Pincher and all. 'Live and let live' is my motto, or, rather, 'Let live, that you may deserve to live.'"

Such sentiments received a silent "amen" from the gentle wife of the banker, and an audible one from the vicar of Ovington; who, among the numerous benefits heaped by his patron the banker on his parish, began to conceive that the greatest of all might prove the hospitable, open hearted neighbour he had provided for the vicarage.

Dr. Markham's prejudices as a high churchman had always rendered the Roman Catholic baronets of Burlington Manor a stumbling-block in his pastoral way; and though the judicious liberality of Richard Hamlyn *almost* sufficed the needs of the parish, the generous Hamilton had already shown himself a more apt representative of the bounty of Providence, which sendeth its rain on the just and unjust—neither assuming with the poor the severity of a judge, nor with their pastor the pride of a rich man.

Richard Hamlyn was one of those who measure out their dole with as many conditions to the naked and hungry as though they had incurred his charity by a crime; nor could Dr. Markham disguise from himself that, after only three months' acquaintance, he was on a pleasanter footing with Colonel Hamilton than with the more correctly-spoken neighbour at Dean Park, who invariably made him feel that the parson and his wife were invited to dine now and then at the great house to "keep up the respectability of the church in the eyes of the lower classes;" or, in other words, to ensure the attendance of his servants and labourers at church, where they were frightened out of picking and stealing the property of their betters, and inspired with becoming deference for those in authority over them.

It was a real comfort, therefore, to the heart of the vicar, to find himself respected by Colonel Hamilton as a privileged expositor of the truths of the Gospel, and invited to his table as a neighbour and gentlemanly companion rather than as a professional man.

Dr. Markham was, however, too well aware of Mrs. Hamlyn's subordinate importance in the family to attribute to *her* any portion of the overweening purse-pride of Dean Park.

"It must be many years, madam," said he, respectfully addressing her, as they sat overlooking the flower-beds from the open door of the conservatory, "since you enjoyed the sight of your own roses in bloom? This is the first summer I remember you to have spent in Warwickshire. I often observe to Mrs. Markham, that, while the owners of the three finest seats in the neighbourhood remain pent in the stifling metropolis, she and I—a poor parson and his wife—monopolize the enjoyment of their beauties!"

"You do not, I hope, grudge my having at length come to share them with you?" inquired Mrs. Hamlyn, with a smile. "It has always consoled me for my confinement in London to know that the flowers and shrubberies at Dean were at least enjoyed by those who fill my place so kindly during my absence, in duties where it were otherwise difficult indeed to find a representative!"

Mrs. Markham, a nervous little woman, who could never be encouraged out of her village timidity by the civilities of the Manor or Dean Park, stammered something nearly unintelligible about her delight in being the dispenser of Mrs. Hamlyn's benevolence.

"But what the deuse do you mean by the *three* finest seats in the country, my dear doctor?" suddenly interrupted Colonel Hamilton.

"I fancy you have not yet visited the Hyde; which, begging yours and Mrs. Hamlyn's pardon, is the finest place within twenty miles round," replied the vicar.

"The Hyde—*the Hyde?* Never even heard of it," cried Colonel Hamilton. "I must really get a map of the county to hang up in my hall!"

"Surely you remember the fine woods I pointed out to you as Lord Vernon's, the day we drove over together from Braxham Heath?" inquired Mrs. Hamlyn.

"To be sure I do! But how was I to guess they belonged to a family-seat?"

"The Braxham woods clothe a fine acclivity. The Hyde, like most old houses, lies at the foot," said the vicar, in explanation.

"Gad! I'm glad to hear of more neighbours than I counted on!" cried the sociable old gentleman. "The more the merrier—the more the merrier—especially if I persist in my intention of spending my winters in the country. Let me see. The Manor makes up fourteen spare beds; and besides ourselves," he continued, glancing at the whole party, but addressing Mrs. Hamlyn, "there's your two sons, who I hope will be here at Christmas. Old Gratwycke of Gratwycke House tells me *he* is too old to sleep out of his own house. But tell me, pray, *who* is it lives at the Hyde?"

"I might also answer *no one*," replied Dr. Markham, "so little advantage does the neighbourhood derive from the society of Lord Vernon's family. His lordship's principal seat is in Northumberland; and since the present peer came to his title, he has only visited Warwickshire once or twice, avowedly to hunt with the Duke of Elvaston's hounds, whose best coverts lie on this side the county."

"The Vernons associate very little with their country neighbours," added Mrs. Hamlyn, "which we regret the less, as the ford at Braxham is unpleasant enough in winter, when they are usually here, and to go round by Barsthorpe bridge doubles the distance."

The parson's wife could scarcely sufficiently admire the fluency with which Mrs. Hamlyn accounted for what the lesser thrones and dominions interpreted into the pride of all the Vernons; who presumed upon their length of pedigree towards the banker, as much as the banker presumed towards others upon his length of purse.

"In short, these fine folks are not neighbourly!" was Colonel Hamilton's summary of the case. "Well, there's room enough in the air for high-flyers and low-flyers! If they can do without *us*, we must do without *them*. I'm sur-

prised, though! We think a deal of a lord in Indy, 'cause we seldom have more than one at a time. A phœnix is a phœnix, and a governor-general's a governor-general. But I fancied, that in Lon'on, where there's a whole house full of 'em, these great lords thought less of themselves."

"We scarcely know *what* the Vernons think of themselves, for they are almost strangers in the county," observed Mrs. Hamlyn. "They have not been here these two years."

"If there's nobody at the Hyde, then, why shouldn't I go and indulge myself with a peep at the place?" cried Colonel Hamilton.

"I think you would, perhaps, be more pleased with Ormeau," said Mrs. Hamlyn, timidly.

"But Ormeau is out of distance. One can't get from Burlington to the Duke of Elvaston's without post-horses," interposed the vicar.

"And my chief object is the drive," cried Colonel Hamilton. "The first cool day, doctor, suppose we go over in my phaeton?"

The vicar readily acquiesced. The plan suited all parties. Between the Vernons and the Hamlyns there existed a coldness which, the fathers of both having been friends, might be considered enmity; and, even during the absence of the family, Mrs. Hamlyn was not fond of appearing an intruder at the Hyde. It was not a regular show-place; *i. e.*, one of those great houses whose great lords sanction their housekeeper in exhibiting their state apartments and pictures to strangers, on the mulct of a piece of gold. But on inscribing their names in a book (kept for the purpose of recording these tributes to the family vanity), the country neighbours were privileged; and one of the pragmaticalities of Richard Hamlyn was a dislike to have his patronymic figure in the register of his haughty neighbour more than a certain number of times in the year, when forced to show off the lions of the Dean Park neighbourhood to visiters of mark and distinction. Whenever a countess was his inmate, he took care to parade her to the Hyde, uniting the name of her ladyship by a bracket with those of "Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn, of Dean Park." But his wife was sufficiently cognizant of his weaknesses to suspect that he would not wish to appear there as the bear-leader of a new-comer into the county.

Moreover, there had been of late election-feud between the banker and Lord Vernon; a member of whose family was usually the Whig representative of the county, while Hamlyn figured in Parliament as the Tory member for a neighbouring borough, in which the Vernon interest was invariably defeated.

So far from loving his neighbour as himself, Lord Vernon despised Dean Park as much as Dean Park detested Lord Vernon. According to the Christian custom of modern times, however, they hated each other in civil toleration; on that sort of visiting acquaintance which approaches nearest to the blood-stained and deadly feuds of the Middle Ages. They mutually shook hands, as if caressing a rattlesnake; while the ladies of the two families presented compliments to each other, or requested the honour of each other's company, or were each other's "very sincerely," as occasion needed.

It was a comfort, therefore, to Mr. Hamlyn, when the vicar of Ovington consented to act as cicerone to Colonel Hamilton in his visit to the stately old mansion of the Hyde.

CHAPTER III.

It stood imbosom'd in a happy valley,
Crown'd by high woodlands, where the Druid oak
Stood like Caractacus, in act to rally
His hosts—with broad arms 'gainst the thunder-stroke;
And from beneath the boughs were seen to sally
The dappled foresters; as day awoke,
The branching stag swept down, with all his herd,
To quaff a brook that murmured like a bird.

BYRON.

"By George, my dear doctor! these people *have* a wee bit of excuse for thinking curious old port of themselves," cried Colonel Hamilton, when, after crossing Braxham ferry, and sweeping past a quaint old Gothic lodge, his phaeton entered one of those noble English parks whose oaks are contemporaries of Queen Bess, and over whose richly swarded slopes no ploughshare has passed in the memory of man. "Why, this fine avenue must be full two miles in length!"

"'Tis the finest in England, next to the Long Walk at Windsor," replied the vicar, attempting, as became his cloth, a quotation from Cowper in honour of avenues, which his companion pronounced to be deused fine, and recollected perfectly in Byron.

"Is *that* the house?" added he, pointing to a venerable pile of Gothic almshouses, indistinctly seen from the road through openings in a grove of sycamores, whose heavy foliage seemed to impart additional airiness to their slight pinnacles.

"The *house?*" replied the vicar, smiling; "if the owner of the Hyde could only hear you! That is Vernon College, a charitable endowment of the reign of Edward VI. A large portion of the Vernon property, in this and other counties, consists of abbey lands—grants from the crown at the Reformation. It was an act of atonement, probably, on the part of Henry VIII.'s favourite, John Lord Vernon, to bestow this gift upon the poor, to repay the injuries of the Church."

"Or, rather, I suppose," remonstrated Colonel Hamilton, with ex-ecclesiastical interpretation, "the suppression of the monasteries, expressly endowed by pious persons for the entertainment and succour of the indigent and sick, demanded a substitution from the charity of the wealthy nobility."

"We will not inquire too curiously into the motives and conscience of John Lord Vernon," cried Dr. Markham, good-humouredly, "as I fear our sole information must be derived from his brass effigy in Braxham Church. Suffice it that, from his day to the present, the almshouses have been admirably kept up. But look! before you stands the old Manor House of the Vernons."

Having now reached nearly the end of the avenue, they were within view of a stately mansion, of Elizabethan architecture, standing in a spacious court, enclosed with palisades and gateways of enscrolled iron-work. Approached from so vast a distance by a gradually declining avenue, the house, like most ancient mansions, took the traveller by surprise when its full extent of frontage was developed before him.

"And Lord Vernon, you say, has a nobler seat than even *this?*" exclaimed Colonel Hamilton, in the simplicity of his admiration.

"A more cheerful one, I fancy, as regards neighbourhood. Vernon Castle is at no great distance from Alnwick and Chillingham."

"And the Hyde at no great distance from

Burlington Manor and Dean Park," added the colonel. "'Tis as broad as it's long."

Dr. Markham was, perhaps, of opinion that it was considerably longer than it was broad; but a spiritual pastor had no right to enlarge upon the vast distinction between lordly castles and squirearchical residences like Dean Park.

"And you say they reside here only a few weeks in the year, and that all the rest of the time this noble mansion is untenanted?" exclaimed Colonel Hamilton, when, the courtyard gates being opened by a shabby stableboy, they drove up to the venerable porch. "Doctor, doctor! with all the talk one hears against pluralities in the Church, I wonder when a law will pass 'gainst plurality of palaces in private families? There's a deal to be said, I suppose, both *pro* and *con* the subdivision of inheritance, according to Boney's Code; but, by George, if *I* were in Parliament, nothing should prevent my getting up and proposing an act compelling every man, having many sons and many family mansions, to bequeath 'em a country-house a piece to be happy in, and rid the country of the nuisance of vagrant younger brothers."

"The chapter is a wide one to embark in, just now particularly," added Dr. Markham, "within the gates of a man who, in addition to his English seats, has a castle in Ireland large enough to contain the village of Braxham, which, to my knowledge, he has not visited since he came to his estate."

And, ere Colonel Hamilton could express his indignation in reply, the vicar led the way into the great hall, where the old housekeeper, in her starched coif and lawn apron, awaited their approach, with her keys in her hand, and in her mouth the cut and dry exposition of the glories of the house of Vernon, a litany of the pomps and vanities of the Hyde.

All was now paraded in succession; the grand staircase—the Baron's gallery—the golden chamber—the Gobelin suite—the blue damask—the Holbein room—the cedar parlour—the chapel—the painted hall; and Colonel Hamilton's raptures increased at the exhibition of every chef d'œuvre displayed by old Mrs. Harkness, with a becoming sense of its importance and—her own.

Above all, the series of venerable family portraits, and a thousand curious relics connected with the olden time, seemed to rejoice his heart almost as much as though he had been born a Vernon. This realization of the past appeared to inspire him, for the first time, with faith in the existence of the Middle Ages.

"This is precisely the sort of thing the Yankees envy us!" cried he, after surveying the Barons' gallery with delight; "the sort of thing that secures Old England against the hubbub of a commonwealth!"

"A link in the chain of the Constitution, which, by keeping the vassal faithful, renders the noble loyal," added the doctor, in a phrase so antithetical that it sounded replete with meaning.

"I can't find it in my heart to forgive the man who owns such a place," added the colonel, enthusiastically, "for choosing to live elsewhere."

The old housekeeper smoothed down her apron, but did not smooth her ruffled brows, at hearing the Right Honourable Lord Vernon apostrophized as "a man." Though the name inscribed by her blunt visiter in the book, and Colonel Hamilton's reputation in the neighbourhood for liberality, prepared her for a nabob's fee at parting, and to be patient under any extent of insult or injury in the interim, her wrath nearly exploded on hearing him enlarge to his reverend companion upon the dignity and interest of the Hyde, but the vast superiority of Burlington Manor.

"I should have been moped to death in a magnificent old dungeon like this!" was his ever-recurring exclamation. "This tapestry would give me the blue devils. People must have had ancestors in Harry the Eighth's time to put up with it. Why, the Manor is thrice as airy, and fifty times more convenient; to say nothing that Goody Johnston would have died here of the ague! Hamlyn knew just what would suit me. As a country gentleman, I am far better off at the Manor."

The jerk with which old Mrs. Harkness snapped the key in the door of the state-apartments, after locking out the utterer of these insolent heresies, probably conveyed but half her contempt towards the presumptuous offender. Regarding herself as part and parcel of the illustrious family of the Vernons, Dean Park was her washpot, and over Burlington Manor did she cast her shoe.

"It is enough to keep my lord away from the place," muttered the stern housekeeper, as she dropped the colonel's sovereign scornfully into her purse, "to be troubled with the intrusion of the upstart tribe of Hamlyn the banker!"

Dr. Markham's description to his wife of the scarcely-suppressed choler of the irate old lady, served that evening to enliven the homely tea-table of the Vicarage.

"Colonel Hamilton was pleased, then, with his drive?" demanded Mrs. Markham of her husband.

"Pleased as a child. It does one's heart good to see a gray-headed man so fresh in spirits. He enjoyed all he saw and heard like a schoolboy at home for the holydays."

"And what is he else?" inquired Mrs. Markham. "He tells me he went out to India at fifteen—a raw boy from the Charter House—half educated, and wholly ignorant of English habits and pleasures."

"So much the better for *him!* To the young men of the present day, on emerging from Haileybury, India is banishment, and banishment which their expensive habits tend to prolong. Hamilton was both frugal and contented, and now he is come home full of eagerness for the common pleasures with which other men are surfeited."

"His chief pleasure, worthy man, seems to be doing good," observed Mrs. Markham, who was bound Colonel Hamilton's slave forever by the number of yards of flannel and pairs of blankets with which he had already enriched her treasury for the Ovington poor. "Not a particle of self seems to act as a drawback upon his kindly feelings! All is sunshine in his heart; and he likes to dispense a portion of the warmth to other people. I cannot understand the friendship that unites him to so mere a man of business as—"

"Hush! my dear! It is not for *us* to enlarge upon the faults or failings of Dean Park," remonstrated the vicar. "Between ourselves, however, I've an idea that Hamlyn was not particularly anxious the old gentleman should visit the domain at the Hyde."

"Afraid, perhaps, of putting him out of conceit with his own?"

"Why, certainly, the good colonel's respect for our Ovington school-houses and infirmaries *was* a little diminished on observing the priority of such institutions at Vernon College. But to what does this amount? That the Vernons have been doing for four centuries what the Hamlyns began only forty years ago, but will, I trust, persist in for four centuries to come! Napoleon's marshal, old Lefevre, once said to a nobleman of the *ancient regime*, 'You are mighty proud of your ancestors.' Well, *I* am an ancestor! Some day or other, Hamlyn's descendants will be in the Upper House."

"But Dean Park will never be the Hyde of 2235!" observed the vicar's wife, shaking her head.

"I'm afraid not," rejoined her husband, laughing at her solemnity of tone. "Whatever else we do for posterity, we don't build for them. However, I should have been vexed had poor Hamlyn witnessed this morning the surprise of his Indian friend, on discovering that the acts of beneficence he had believed to originate solely in the wisdom and virtue of Dean Park—an especial invention of Richard Hamlyn, Esq., M.P. —are but a modernized edition of the old charities of the Vernons."

Little did Dr. Markham surmise, debarred as a Protestant minister from the advantages of confession over the parishioners to whom he was appointed to preach the Gospel on Sundays, the extent to which this rivalship and jealousy had influenced through life the conduct and character of Mr. Hamlyn. His disposition and destinies had been literally created by the vicinity of Dean Park to the Hyde.

The only son of a mercantile man unexpectedly enriched by one of those startling speculations which begat and extinguished millions during the early half of the last century, the elder Hamlyn had purchased the estate of the Dean, enclosed the Park, and concentrated the property, leaving to his son, the father of the present proprietor, the care of erecting a family mansion proportionate to the estate.

People never *do* build houses in proportion to their estates. Their pride will not let them, and their architects will not let them. To build a house is, as it were, to favour the public with the measure of your fortune; and either policy as a banker, or weakness as a man, inclined old Hamlyn to create an exaggerated idea of his property, by providing himself with a residence requiring a nobleman's income and establishment for its support.

The Lord Vernon of that generation was unluckily a simple, sociable man, estimating his position as much too low, as the present representative of the family rated it too high. United to Hamlyn of Dean by the bond of country neighbourship, viz., to preserve foxes, prosecute trespassers, and blunderbuss poachers for the benefit of the community, the moment the banker began to build, the peer began to beset him with evil counsel.

"There is nothing more mistaken than to stint yourself in the proportions of your rooms, the numbering your bedrooms, or the accommodation of your offices, for the value of a trifle of brick and mortar!" said he. "A couple of thousand pounds, more or less, covers all the difference between an indifferent house and a good one."

Acting on this principle, old Hamlyn preferred building one that was excellent, and completing his establishment on the model of that of Lord Vernon; and the consequence was, that, when the new family mansion of the Hamlyns came to be discussed at justice meetings, turnpike meetings, and quarter sessions, the smaller 'squires of the neighbourhood ventured to predict that, on the death of the old banker and division of his property, Dean Park would prove too much for his son. Old Gratwycke, of Gratwycke House, quoted from Bacon that a house with wings oftentimes flies away with an estate; while Mr. Barlow, of Alderham, jocosely christened the banker's folly "the Lombard-street Ormeau."

These remarks did not happen to reach the ear of Richard Hamlyn till he had negatived *one* auspicious occasion of improving his fortunes by uniting himself with a woman who, having only ten thousand pounds, passed in the moneyed circles to which he belonged for being penniless. The insulting surmises of his country neighbours stung him to the soul; yet, on his father's death, which occurred within a year of his marriage, so far from abandoning Dean Park, or allowing the admirable charitable foundations created by his parents to decay, Richard Hamlyn, as has been already advanced, increased rather than diminished the liberality of his housekeeping; and by the admirable discipline kept up in his establishment—kitchen, stables, farm, nay, even in the family circle—was enabled to maintain his position in the county, head and front with the Vernons of the Hyde, and the Burlingtons of Burlington Manor. Nobody had any farther right to say that the old banker had over-built himself. The only change for the worse, perceptible in the household, was in the spirits of its master.

Meanwhile, as much as the present proprietor of Dean Park seemed resolved to walk in the steps of his predecessor, did the Lord Vernon, who in process of time—and a slow process it was—succeeded to the jovial old sportsman, appear determined to institute a new order of things at the Hyde. As if he had taken a spite at the old mansion where his father had survived so immoderately, he spent all his interludes of London dissipation at his castle in the North; and when he *did* visit Warwickshire (which, in the old lord's time, he had represented in Parliament), his attentions to his neighbours were paid with such punctilious regard to their graduated claims upon his notice, that one or two of the more plain-spoken country 'squires had seen fit to reject as an insult the notice measured out to them in proportion to the exact square of their acres. Old Gratwycke, of Gratwycke House, for instance, whose property consisted of a farm on which his family had been settled from the days of the Dun Cow, did not feel, in the opportunity of deciding once a year upon the merit of Lord Vernon's French cook, Italian confectioner, and German *maitre d'hôtel*, sufficient repayment for the impertinence of his lordship's wife and daughter. Unable to maintain the same terms with the son on which he had lived with the father, he chose to forget the existence of the Hyde.

Such was not the case with Richard Hamlyn. *He* could not at once renounce the ambition in which he had been born and nurtured, of living on a friendly footing with the Vernons. He fancied that the intimacy had given him importance with his wife's family—with his city connexions—with the county—with the world; and

whenever Lord and Lady Vernon were in Warwickshire, smarted severely under the undisguised neglects of the Hyde.

But while the London banker continued to hunger and thirst after the notice of the great people who had withdrawn the light of their countenance, the rest of the country neighbours were satisfied to enlist *their* sympathies in the long illness and early death of Sir Roger Burlington, and the arrival of a successor at the Manor. A thousand wild surmises went forth touching the new lessee—the strange nabob—the rich widower—who, if too old to marry again, was at least of an age to die and be succeeded in his fortune. Colonel Hamilton was a perfect treasure to the gossips of Braxham and Ovington! His couple of native servants—his hookah—his Thibet goats—his Indian curiosities of all kinds—were as great a resource to the parish as the arrival of a show of wild beasts; and when it became known that he talked of a ball for Miss Hamlyn's *début* at Christmas, everybody was quite satisfied that Sir Roger Burlington had done wisely to vacate his family-seat, and that they were under considerable obligations to the widow for having settled in Italy.

In process of time, the feuds between the colonel's factotum, Johnston, and Sir Roger's head gardener, Anderson, whom, at Hamlyn's suggestion, he had hired with the place, occupied nearly as much attention in the vicinity of Ovington as a county election. The colonel had chosen to give his duplicate key of the gardens and pineries to Goody Johnston, and the head gardener to give warning. Opinions were divided. Some thought that a gardener who used to ensure the late Sir Roger his green peas at Christmas, his strawberries on Valentine's-day, and his peaches on April-fool's-day, was quite right not to be "put upon," but to go and seek his two hundred guineas per annum elsewhere. But the majority were decided Johnstonians, and voted that Colonel Hamilton, like the chamberlain-making kings of Germany, had a right to bestow his keys where he thought proper.

Even Mrs. Hamlyn ventured to give an opinion, when she understood that the indignant Anderson had offered his services at the Hyde.

"I am afraid you will miss him sadly in the flower-garden," said she. "From long practice, Anderson understands the Burlington forcing-houses better than any stranger can do."

"My dear good lady," cried the colonel, in reply, "I would rather all the shrubberies were rooted up, and that never another pineapple should be eaten in my house, than put up with a fellow who has offered offence to Goody Johnston! What harm would she have done in the gardens, more than my wife or daughter, if I had 'em? *Let* the fellow go to the Hyde, and let the Hyde go to the devil, rather than that any slight should be shown, under my roof, to the faithful attendant of the most faithful wife that ever bequeathed her memory to the respect of a husband."

On this occasion, even the banker exercised his influence in vain. Mr. Hamlyn discovered that though, in matters of business, a puppet in his hands, the old colonel, where his feelings were concerned, would display the most mulish obstinacy.

Satisfied from her letters that his wife was too high-minded or too indolent to counteract by her personal influence that of the favourite servants of whose ascendency over Colonel Hamilton he entertained the most mistrustful jealousy, the banker accused himself of improvidence in having placed the nabob beyond the reach of his own daily obsequiousness and serviceability. The following week, therefore, he arrived on a visit of investigation at Dean Park.

"Excuse me, my dear Hamlyn," cried his candid old friend, on seeing him, "if I own that your sallow face and careworn wrinkles put me wonderfully in conceit with my country life. Why, you're young enough to be my son; and, by George! you look old enough to be my father!"

"The late hours and trying atmosphere of the House of Commons make sad inroads into the constitution!" replied Hamlyn, with the air of the martyr.

"Come, come, come! none of your flourishes in honour of your services to the country. A banker was never known to die of patriotism," cried the colonel. "Those jaundiced looks have very little to do with zeal for the nation. 'Tis all *shop*, my dear sir—all gold-spinning—all the wear and tear of filthy lucre—all the care and anxiety of money-making—all the yellow leprosy, as I call it!"

"Say, rather, of taking care of other people's money," replied Hamlyn, attempting a smile.

"So long as you take such capital care of *mine*, I suppose I must find no fault," replied the Lord of Burlington Manor, jocosely. "But I feel that I'm beginning to have over you all the advantage of a country gentleman—not but that the country gentleman's estate bears its brambles as well as its blackberries. I suppose Mrs. Hamlyn, or dear Lydia, wrote you word that the people hereabouts have been playing the very deuse with me?"

This familiar and affectionate designation of his daughter grated disagreeably on the ear of the banker; and, accepting the word "people" in its lowest sense, "Mrs. Hamlyn informed me," said he, "that the fishponds at Burlington Manor had been robbed."

"Ay, so the keepers swore, who most likely dragged them themselves. But *I* alluded to Markham and Gratwycke, who have dragged *me* into the commission of the peace. The doctor chose to assert, sir, that I had hired the trouble and worry of being a magistrate in hiring Burlington Manor!"

"Very officious of Markham!" observed the banker, who disliked every measure tending to increase Colonel Hamilton's connexion with society, and chose, at all events, that the proposition should proceed from himself. It seemed to *him*, indeed, as if Gratwycke and the vicar, in meddling with Colonel Hamilton, had encroached upon his property.

"Had I been aware of this in time, I should have protested against your incurring so much trouble and responsibility," said he. "At your age, my dear sir, I really think—"

"Come, come, come! I've no great right to take shelter under my age," cried the colonel. "These gentlemen see that I am young enough to amuse myself by scampering over the country on a pony after my little Lydia, and are kind enough to procure me a more useful employment for my time."

"It is true there is a sad dearth of efficient men among us," replied Hamlyn, perceiving

that the colonel *chose* to be put upon. "The neighbourhood is thin. The Hyde lends us no assistance. Gratwycke is nearly superannuated."

"And not an idle man under five-and-sixty for twenty miles round!" cried Colonel Hamilton. "Poor Lydia, sad news for poor dear little Lydia! I don't know what you'll do for your Christmas ball, my dear, unless you can persuade your brother Walter to bring you down some beaux from Lon'on."

Richard Hamlyn, though his previous instructions had authorized, on the part of his family, every sacrifice likely to make the country pleasant to his valued constituent, was annoyed at the tone of familiarity which seemed to have established itself between Colonel Hamilton and his daughters. Before he returned to town, he remonstrated severely with his wife concerning the relaxation of decorum, arising from the absence of Miss Creswell.

"What will the Vernons think," said he, "when they hear of the Miss Hamlyns (after the care bestowed on their education) scampering—I use Colonel Hamilton's word—'scampering' over the country on ponies? And what chance has Walter of recommending himself to the colonel's good-will, if Lydia is constantly made his first object?"

Mrs. Hamlyn was too respectful a wife to vindicate either her girls or herself; but after her husband's return to town, she was amused to perceive how much the aid of the country had opened the eyes of the old colonel to the peculiarities of his friend.

"Hamlyn's quite right to stick to Lon'on!" said he. "Hamlyn's cut out for a man of business. Squirefying is *not* his element. He hasn't in him the true smack of the country gentleman. 'Tis all dot-and-carry-one with him, even in the middle of a turnip-field. His tenants respect him, but more by name than nature; and, notwithstanding all he has done for the poor, and the admirable management by which it has been brought about, they seem to feel themselves doubly poor in his presence. He's too prim and trim for a sportsman, too in-doorish for a farmer. Lombard-street and Cavendish Square, Parliament and city meetings, are the place for Hamlyn. There are some folks who don't seem to have been born for the open air!"

"At forty-five, it is difficult to guess what any man is born for," said Mrs. Hamlyn, with a sigh. "Grave as my husband now appears, I can assure you, that when I married, he was one of the gayest men about town—as gay as his son Walter is now."

"Walter's wild, is he? I'm glad of that! there's always hope of a wild young man! My son Jack was one of the wildest dogs ever turned out of Eton. Walter was quartered at Windsor all the time I was in Lon'on, and I'm beginning to want to make his acquaintance. Does he never come down to Dean Park?"

"When the hunting season begins."

"A curious reason for visiting his father's house! Like my friend, Sir Joshua Alltrump, who told me he attended divine service at the Chapel Royal 'cause the music was so fine."

"My son is, I admit, passionately fond of hunting," pleaded Mrs. Hamlyn.

"Well, well, 'tis something in these times for a youngster to be passionately fond of anything! To *me*, all the boys appear as dull and careworn as if they'd spent a life in Lombard-street; old before they're breeched, and decrepit in their accidence. I should never be surprised, nowadays, to hear of an Eton boy having the gout. Well! I must wait patient, I suppose, till the hounds are unkennelled, to shake hands with Master Watty."

Mrs. Hamlyn could scarcely forbear smiling at the idea of the indignation with which (had Sheet-street barracks been within earshot of Dean Park) her superfine son would have heard himself thus familiarly designated, by an individual who might have travelled from (Captain Hamlyn's) Dan to Beersheeba, *i. e.*, from St. James's-street to Whitehall, without receiving a bow of recognition from the club-windows, and whose clothes were so indefinitely cut by his nameless tailor as to have proved an equally good fit for any other man in the county.

She amended her smile, however, into a secret prayer that the time might come when Walter, now the slave of appearances, would recognise the sterling merit of a man like the simple-hearted being before her.

CHAPTER IV.

Before my gaze I see my youth,
The ghost of gentler years, arise;
With looks that yearn'd for every truth,
And wings that sought the farthest skies.

Beside that ghost of time gone by
I stand upon the waste alone,
And if a sunbeam light the sky,
It wakes no flow'rets from the stone.

The icy calm that smiles on all,
But comes from pride that veils the pain;
Alas! how much we fain would call
Content, is nothing but disdain.

E. L. Bulwer.

Meanwhile, the merits of the new resident at Burlington Manor were becoming appreciated in quarters more important than the fastidious fancy of a captain of the Household Brigade. The county gentry already congratulated themselves on the acquisition of such a coadjutor in their labours of public peace-keeping, as a man accustomed for forty years long to administrative functions, yet untried by the disappointments which are somewhat apt to sour the philanthropy, and distress the patriotism of the conscript fathers of a shire. At turnpike meetings, justice meetings, agricultural meetings, the hearty, active old man was invariably the first and last in the field.

But, above all, he was recognised by the minor guardians of the public weal as the proprietor of a capacious heart and purse, the strings of which were always open. The circumstance which had first drawn his attention in India to the firm of Hamlyn and Co., was the magnitude and consistency of their subscriptions to all public charities and institutions; little surmising, good easy man, that these donations were so many advertisements of their solidity, by speciously introducing a commercial name into the columns of the newspapers, to be wafted to the four quarters of the globe on the wings of their well-calculated beneficence. But for this blessed iteration, in fact, their name might never have reached Ghazerapore.

As innocently as he had fallen into the snare, did he now conquer, by similar means, the esteem of a county predisposed against him as an invader of the property of the ancient house of Burlington.

"Who is this man, the new tenant of poor Burlington's place?" had been eagerly inquired, when first the news transpired of the desecration of the Manor.

"I really don't know. A person who made his money in India, picked up by Hamlyn, the banker, in the course of his city connexion," was the disparaging reply. And the country gentlemen, averse to new-comers in general, and doubly averse to the idea of a rich upstart, who would crush them by his ostentation, outshine them by his equipage, and corrupt their homely households by the prodigalities of his servants' hall, entered into tacit combination against the banker's *protégé*.

But no sooner did they find in the neighbour whom they had pictured to themselves as a peevish, enervate hypochondriac, the victim of liver and blue pill, a hale, happy-spirited old gentleman, full of child like interest in the memorabilia of the county, as well as of manly sympathy in its wants and welfare, than they extended towards him the right-hand of fellowship, wondering only how any bond of friendship could subsist between the frank, garrulous old Indian, and the calm, phlegmatic, hard-headed owner of Dean Park.

For in the county, Hamlyn was more approved than liked. His gentlemanly deportment, and handsome, orderly establishment, commanded respect; but the neighbouring squires were never sorry, during his absence, to have a fling at his political surfaceism, or the cockney niceties of his model farm.

Among the foremost ranks of these stood a gentleman of the name of Barlow, who took considerable pains to impress himself on public attention as "Barlow of Alderham," lest, being chiefly known in the county as Lord Vernon's agent, it should be overlooked that he was an entity by inheritance, an esquire by qualification. That the Alderham in question was "a moated grange," standing on a farm of four hundred a year, signified nothing. The great grandsires of his great grandsire had been born under its roof, and he was consequently entitled to talk loud at the convivial and other meetings of the neighbourhood, about "county families," "hereditary rights," and the "landed interests" of the shire. Mr. Barlow, of Alderham, seldom lowered his voice, indeed, unless when Lord Vernon, his principal, happened to be residing at the Hyde; but he was observed never to raise it so defyingly as in the presence of Richard Hamlyn, of Dean Park.

For in their various election contests, Barlow of Alderham appeared in the field as generalissimo of the Vernon faction, and being invariably defeated, it was but natural he should aim his avenging darts, on other occasions, at the vulnerable heel of the banker. In many points, he enjoyed advantages over him. He was always on the spot, constantly holding forth wherever two or three "landed-interest" apostles were gathered together, in daily scud across the country on his well-known brown cob, on Lord Vernon's business or his own; and, above all, as vicegerent of the estate of the Hyde, he dispensed the squirearchical patronage of its shooting, its fishing, and the private keys of the park. Those who wished to stand well with the Vernons fancied they could not begin better than by standing well with Barlow of Alderham.

All this had been fully interpreted by Hamlyn to Colonel Hamilton on his first arrival in Warwickshire; and as the old gentleman had no disposition for toadying, and was disgusted at his very first interview by the bow-wow tone of the agent, and his perpetual allusions to "county families" and "hereditary rights," he received, with as much coldness as was compatible with his humane nature, the civil overtures of a man unfairly represented to him by the banker as the servile slave-driver of a lord. He could not dissever Barlow (of Alderham) in his mind from the salaried tenant-screw of Lord Vernon.

Surprised at the disregard with which his civilities were treated by one whom Dr. Markham and old Gratwycke described as the most courteous and kindly of human beings, Mr. Barlow, debarred by a sense of duty towards the political interests of his patron from being resentful, was careful to issue instructions to the keepers at the Hyde that the land and water privileges enjoyed by the late Sir Roger Burlington should be conceded to his successor. A key of the private gates of the park was accordingly forwarded to the Manor, specifically inscribed with the name of Colonel Hamilton, who, ignorant of county customs, and conceiving the right of transit over Lord Vernon's property to be one of the many immunities included in his leasehold of Burlington Manor, acknowledged the courtesy by a handsome gratuity to the head-keeper, but not a word of acknowledgment to the higher powers.

Mrs. Hamlyn, who, in common with the other neighbouring families, possessed a key, but was scrupulous in using it, in deference to the uneasy position of her husband with regard to Lord Vernon at every fresh election, was startled to perceive how thoroughly the unsuspecting colonel made himself at home at the Hyde.

"In dusty weather, that beautiful pinetum is a monstrous resource to the neighbourhood," cried he. "I delight in the smell of the thyme, crushed under the wheels of my phaeton; yet, except myself (the head-keeper says, a smart, intelligent, civil fellow!), not a soul ever sets foot in it."

Sophia hesitated for a moment whether to hint to the old man, so ready to contribute to the pleasures of others, that even *he* might do well to abstain; that Lord Vernon was supposed to be tenacious of the privacy of his reserved walks, more especially as regarded persons connected with Dean Park. But Colonel Hamilton was not the man to be enlightened by a *hint*. His self-love was not of a susceptible or mistrustful kind. Aware that Dr. Markham profited by a short cut across the Hyde every time he had business at Braxham, he would have laughed at the idea of offending the *hauteur* of the Vernons by frank acceptance of a favour spontaneously conceded.

Before Barlow of Alderham had thoroughly recovered his surprise at the coolness of an individual who, so far from belonging to a "county family," was unconnected with any family at all, the colonel was giving offence by new insults to his flag.

During the long illness of Sir Roger Burlington, the sporting over his estates had been placed, without reservation, at the disposal of his friend and neighbour at Dean Park, the terms of election enmity between whom and Barlow forbade any civilities towards the latter on the shooting score. But now, on the opening of the shooting season, though the colonel was said to have extended his permissions to shoot over the Manor

to a degree horrific to the feelings of every high-principled game-preserver in the county, no opening had been made for the agent of the adjoining estate of the Hyde—an unneighbourly and monstrous exclusion.

While Barlow of Alderham was huffing over his sense of injury, tidings of Colonel Hamilton's laxity as a game-preserver proved still more appalling to Richard Hamlyn. So thoroughly did he reckon upon retaining his privileges over the Manor with a tenant who avowed his abhorrence of Nock or Manton, double-barrels or single, that he had not made the concession a clause of especial reserve in a lease dictated by himself. As a matter of course, he regarded the preserves of the isolated, friendless old man of Portland Place as his perquisite. And to find them thus desecrated—to learn that, for the future, he had only his own miserable shooting to offer to the aristocratic guests whom it was his glory, every winter, to advertise in the papers as "spending the Christmas holydays at the hospitable seat of Mr. Hamlyn, at Dean Park," was a stroke for which he was unprepared.

All he had hitherto been able to oppose to the galling slights of Lord Vernon, in a worldly sense, was the choiceness of an aristocratic circle under his roof fully rivalling that of the Hyde. As an active member of the Tory party in the House of Commons, Hamlyn possessed a certain degree of influence; while, as a banker, he had found means of obliging various of the nobility, who obliged *him* by their notice in return, dined with him in town, and shot with him in the country. The Ormeau hounds and the Burlington preserves had placed Dean Park among the most desirable places on which lordly placemen or dukes, debarred by distance from sporting at their Scotch or Irish seats, could quarter themselves for the holydays. And now what was to be done? How was he to invite his customary guests, or Walter to bring down to Dean his showy brother officers, without the promise of a *battue?* Colonel Hamilton had done him irreparable injury by his inconsiderate liberality to strangers!

In his private room in Lombard-street, while apparently engaged in calculations involving the fate of millions and the welfare of his clients, the banker pondered heavily upon these things. In that gloomy, silent retreat, the den of his leisure, divided by a wainscot only from the vast counting-house, wherein twenty assiduous clerks were engaged in the active transaction of business, greasing the wheels of public traffic, and amassing grain by grain, the golden sand destined to fill the auspicious hour-glass of the Hamlyn destiny—in that silent retreat, of which, once at least in every day, some trembling petitioner crossed the threshold, referred by the chief clerk to the head of the house for the fiat which was to pronounce his bill dishonoured, or inscribe his check with "no effects"—did Richard Hamlyn, blind to the rise or fall of stocks, indifferent to the fate of Exchequer-bills, and careless of the fluctuations of the money-market, sit cursing his own oversight in having failed to secure to himself the sporting over Burlington Manor.

Though the atmosphere discernible through the skylight of that little chamber was obscured by city smoke, divided from the pure ether of heaven as by the interposing of a blanket, the baffled proprietor of Dean Park beheld, in his mind's eye, the clear blue sky of his country-seat, and heard, in his mind's ear, the popping of hundreds of percussion-guns, engaged in shooting away his prospects in life.

Never could this reverse of fortune, as a landed proprietor, have come more inopportunely! His jealous hatred of the Vernons, so far from mellowing and dropping from the tree, had of late acquired new aggravation. Though he had defeated the predictions of the Hyde that he would be forced to sell an estate where his father had over-built himself, Hamlyn's indignation against the family had been renewed by learning that, at a political London dinner, on being questioned concerning the honourable member for Barthorpe (his Tory opponent), Lord Vernon had spoken of him in terms the most indulgently insulting.

"Of Mr. Hamlyn, personally, I really know nothing," was his lordship's insolent reply. "We exchange cards, bows, dinners, and I believe him to be a well-intentioned person; but my agent (Barlow of Alderham) assures me that Mr. Hamlyn's petty, money-spinning system has done infinite harm in my neighbourhood. Since the introduction of Savings' Banks, Loan Societies, and premium companies of all sorts and kinds at Ovington, all the small farmers in the county fancy themselves on the road to become Rothschilds. It is amazing how mercenary and grasping the very labourers' are becoming, since this notion of percentage gained ground. All their idea is money—money—money! Natural enough, perhaps, on the part of Mr. Hamlyn, to follow the bias of his calling even in his charities; for I verily believe that, were you to drop a London banker out of a caravan in the Desert, his first notion would be to establish a water-company at the nearest well! Mr. Hamlyn will, however, perhaps be the first to repent having introduced the mystery of money-making into his bewildered county."

If Hamlyn, by sacrifices the extent of which was known only to himself, had discountenanced Lord Vernon's former prediction that his father's memory would be disgraced, and his estate brought to the hammer, he was now scarcely less intent upon proving that his children were likely to maintain their footing, if not exactly on the same level, exactly in the same circles as Lord Vernon's own. He had authorized his son Walter to invite, for a week's shooting at Christmas, the cornet of his troop, the young Marquis of Dartford, certain members of whose family he numbered among his constituents, and contemplated adding to the Dean Park party purporting to rival the festivities of the Hyde. But how was he to phrase his invitations to the Earl of Rotherwood, and his brother-in-law Lord Crawley, uncles of the marquis, unless enabled to make honourable mention of the preserves of Burlington Manor?

Little did poor Colonel Hamilton surmise the evils to which he had given rise by an extension of sporting liberality, which, as far as numbers were concerned, had created a popularity that might have enabled him to stand for the county. While Dean Park and the Hyde (in the person of Barlow of Alderham) complained bitterly of a weakness, exposing more rigid landed proprietors to blame, and involving the keepers of the neighbouring estates in endless affrays and squabbles, *he* delighted to see the neighbouring squires, and even farmers, enjoy a day's shooting on the Manor. Though thoroughly de-

spising, as became a practised hog-hunter, the puny field-sports of Great Britain, he was not sorry to find that the note of preparation from the Ormeau kennel was about to reassemble the scattered families of the neighbourhood. The turf being now brown, and the woods bare, it was indeed time that people should return from touring and the seaside to enjoy the beauties of the country.

"More wood, Johnston! more wood!" cried the hospitable old man, one evening, when the ladies of Dean Park and their friends from the Vicarage had been driven behind screens and into recesses by the blaze of a roaring fire of roots at Burlington Manor. "Merry Christmas is coming, and let us welcome him with a bonfire! Well do I remember the bitter mornings when I used to get up by candlelight at Charter House, blowing my fingers all the time to save 'em from being frostbitten! But if we don't make a good, jolly season of it now, 'tis nobody's fault but our own!"

"You have taken care at least, sir, that the poor shall have no reason to complain," observed Mrs. Markham, gratefully.

"I seldom find that they *do* complain half so much as the rich. But this year, even the rich must not grumble! Lydia, for instance, shall have her ball, and her sledge, and her drive to covert every time the hounds meet in the neighbourhood."

"I fear Miss Creswell will interfere with some portion of these arrangements," interposed Mrs. Hamlyn, satisfied that they would incur the entire disapproval of her husband.

"Why, what the deuse! The governess coming back again, is she?" said Colonel Hamilton. "I was in hopes she was pensioned off! I'm sure there's nothing Miss Harriet wants teaching but she might learn from her sister."

"We are expecting a large Christmas party at Dean next week," she replied, not choosing to cite Mr. Hamlyn's opposition, "and I should scarcely know what to do with the girls."

"Do with 'em? Why, let 'em help you to entertain the large party, to be sure!" cried the colonel. "I dare say Lydia would have no objection!"

"Her *father* would. Lord and Lady Rotherwood, and their brother-in-law, Lord Crawley, are coming to us."

"The Home Secretary? By George! I'm glad on't! I want to badger him about having remitted the sentence of that rascal Saltash. But what exception are they likely to take to the society of an agreeable girl like Lydia?"

"As she will not be presented for some months to come, it is scarcely according to etiquette for her to join so large a party."

"And what have such folks as we are to do with etiquette at all? What signifies to any human being whether a Miss Hamlyn have or have not kissed the hand of her majesty? My dear good lady, when great lords think proper to come and sleep under your roof, depend on't, among the people they expect to meet at your table are your own sons and daughters!"

"I am happy to say that Walter *will* be with us," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, unwilling to own her perfect coincidence in his sentiments. "He is coming on the 20th, accompanied by one of his brother officers; and I trust, dear sir, that while our house is enlivened by these guests, you will join our party. The weather is too uncertain for you to return to Burlington at night."

"Faith, I should have no objection!" cried the colonel; "but, unluckily, I've asked Gratwycke's grandson to come over to me for a few days' shooting, and I suppose you've no room to take *him* in?—though Walter might like his company, may be, for I fancy he's to be a brother soldier of the captain's!"

"The idea of that silly, lanky Tom Gratwycke being a brother-any-thing of Walter's!" exclaimed Lydia, unable to restrain her mirth. "Dear, dear Colonel Hamilton! you little know my brother—the pink of fine gentlemen!"

"Is he? He was a deused bad shoeblack at Eton, I know! Jack, whose fag he was, wrote me word he could make nothing of him. As to Tom Gratwycke, I am afraid the lad was a bit of a spoony. But the old gentleman's been wonderful civil in asking me a dozen times to dinner (though I'd as soon dine in the Ovington infirmary as his hot rooms), and the least I could do was to show kindness to his grandson in return. The lad *we* think nothing of is a world's wonder to *him*, the future Gratwycke of Gratwycke—*his* Watty—*his* pink of fine gentlemen!"

On the banker's arrival at Dean, a day or two previous to that of his visiters for the holydays, it was a source of considerable mortification to him that Colonel Hamilton was not of the party. He had reckoned upon his friend's company as prematurely as upon his shooting, and was greatly disappointed to find that the old gentleman was not fated to make acquaintance with his son under all the advantage (to a young man of Walter's brilliant appearance and address) of doing the honours of his father's house to a party of distinction.

Mrs. Hamlyn perceived that her husband was sovereignly displeased; that he thought *she* might have *secured* the company of their neighbour by an earlier invitation. Hamlyn was unusually absent and out of sorts. Christmas is an epoch equally unpropitious to the temper of men of business and their debtors; and the harness of Lombard-street cares in which the banker arrived in Warwickshire, so far from being laid aside, as he had intended, on joining his family, was buckled on anew on learning that an insignificant boy, like Tom Gratwycke, could become an obstacle to his deep-laid projects.

"The Vernons are coming down next week!" said he, fixing a stern eye upon his wife. Then, finding that she did not utter so much as an ejaculation of surprise at an announcement wholly indifferent to her, he added, "and what will they think on finding that a man of Hamilton's property could command no better resource for his Christmas circle than a vulgar hobblede-hoy like young Gratwycke?"

"I should think they would trouble themselves very little about the family arrangements of a perfect stranger!" replied Sophia, finding he insisted upon an answer.

"But *we* are not perfect strangers to them. *We* should have derived some consequence in their eyes from the domestication at our fireside of a man of Hamilton's enormous property, who is supposed to care for nobody but ourselves. I had flattered myself our Christmas party would be a matter of some envy at the Hyde."

"I have little doubt," observed Mrs. Hamlyn, struck by what *she* considered a brillant inspiration, "that if you *really* had Colonel Hamilton's company at heart, it might be obtained by Lydia's intervention. If you will compromise with his whims, by allowing *her* to join the party, as

when we are alone, he might surely be persuaded to defer young Gratwycke's visit till the following week?"

Mr. Hamlyn, who had been traversing the room in a fit of mental irritation, now advanced close to his wife, as if to ensure the exact hearing of her words.

"Lydia?" cried he; "*Lydia* possess sufficient influence over Hamilton to induce him to grant a request he has denied to *us*?"

"You are aware of his fondness for young people," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, composedly; "and his indulgence towards the girls, having ensured their affection in return, they have spent much of their time together during Miss Creswell's absence."

"It was for this, then, that you persuaded me to allow that woman leave of absence?" cried the indignant banker.

"You expressly desired we should do our utmost to render the country agreeable to Colonel Hamilton!"

"Not to the injury of Walter! I never desired to find *Lydia* his favourite. But I see how it is! Aware of my inability to make a provision for my daughters tending to their settlement in life in the brilliant position you desire, you want to bespeak the old man's fortune for them! It would not suit *you* to see Lydia become, like her mother before her, the wife of a poor, drudging man of business. No, no! you know too much of the miseries and privations of such a position. You want her to be a fine lady. You wish Colonel Hamilton's heiress to marry a nobleman. You have had enough of city men. What pride have *you* in my family name? The respectability of Hamlyn of Dean Park is nothing to *you*."

Mrs. Hamlyn raised her gentle eyes towards the angry man in utter consternation.

"But once for all, madam, know *this!*" continued he; "that sooner than Walter should not be enabled to preserve his fitting station in society, and keep up his family place in the style that *his* father and *my* father did before him, I would—"

Mr. Hamlyn paused suddenly, and his wife, breathlessly interested in these singular revelations concerning the destinies of her children, riveted her eyes on his, as if to ascertain the motive of his hesitation. His face had become suddenly blanched, and the words seemed frozen on his lips; when, lo! following the direction of his eyes towards the window, she beheld, leaning against its single pane of plate-glass, the glowing, happy countenance of Colonel Hamilton. The object of their critical conversation stood intently regarding them, having trudged in snow-shoes across the park to welcome his friend to the country.

"On with your greatcoat, and come out to me, Hamlyn!" shouted the old man. "I want to show you some draining-tiles I've had made for me at Ovington, on a plan I've often tried in Indy with success, and the fellow's waiting with 'em in the stable-yard."

Relieved by this cordial appeal from the apprehension that his incautious words might have reached the ear of Colonel Hamilton, yet so unaccustomed to be detected in a state of mental disturbance that he fancied his whole secret must be betrayed in his countenance, Richard Hamlyn stood for a moment, dreading to approach the window.

"Why not come in, my dear colonel?" said he, having ascertained by a glance that his wife had resumed her usual air of enforced serenity.

"No, no!" was the reply. "I have conquered my first startle from the cold, and am in a fine glow. I'm not going to have my nose nipped again by a second *sortie*, after coddling myself in your hot rooms."

"I will be with you in a minute, then," said Hamlyn. "Take a turn in the shrubbery, and I will meet you at the offices."

But instead of obeying, Colonel Hamilton, after his friend's exit, chose to remain at the window, talking through it to Sophia.

"Are you very angry, my dear lady, at my carrying off your good man so soon?" cried he, so loud as to be audible not only to herself, but to the gardeners who were sweeping the snow from the gravel-walks.

"Never mind, never mind! The sledge is to be finished in a day or two (Lydia's sledge—I mean to call it the *Royal Lydia*), and then she and I will drive about the country together all the morning, and leave you to yourselves. I like young folks best! I'm such a frisky old boy myself, that I always want something in its teens about me, to keep my foolish old face in countenance!"

Accoutred for his walk, Hamlyn now made his way along the gravel-walk towards the colonel, who, having at that moment inclined his ear close to the window to catch the faint reply of Mrs. Hamlyn, the banker had no means of surmising the subject of their conversation.

"Ready so soon? Come along with ye, then!" cried Hamilton, starting round on being tapped upon the shoulder, and little aware of the mistrustful glances which his friend was at that moment darting through the window at the confused countenance of his wife. Then seizing the arm of Hamlyn, he dragged him along at a brisk country gentleman pace, somewhat at variance with the dignified habits of the London banker.

Scarcely had they disappeared round the angle of the house, when Mrs. Hamlyn sank heavily into a chair. Clasping her hands together in utter despondency, she felt scarcely equal to confront the new sources of grief and anxiety opening in her long-imbittered existence.

Had certain of her London associates been required to point out a woman enjoying to the utmost the prosperities and contentments of life, it would have been Mrs. Hamlyn of Dean Park. With a seemingly attached and honourable husband, and promising children growing up around her, the career of such a woman was to many a matter of envy. Yet, in reality, her fate was one of those instances of personal disappointment which convert so many cheerful girls into silent and repining women.

Within a year of her happy marriage, within a year of the passionate protestations which, as usual, preceded it, Sophia Hamlyn discovered that she had sunk into nothing in the estimation of her husband. Absorbed by worldly interests, by sordid calculations, by the anxieties of a critical business suddenly devolving on his shoulders, he began to regard a wife and increasing family as domestic encumbrances—a burden upon the onerous honours of Hamlyn of Dean Park—an additional embarrassment to the house of Hamlyn and Co. Still, his deference to the decencies of society and his own high character kept him scrupulously exact to his duties as a husband and parent, and it was only the craving

eye of affection that discovered the alteration of his mood.

Luckily for all parties, Mrs. Hamlyn was a woman of principle; and just as deference to worldly opinion made Richard Hamlyn a regardful husband, the sense of duty silenced all complaints upon her lips. She felt herself to be in the enjoyment of too many of the comforts of life to murmur against Providence. She had married for better for worse; and the worse was not so much the worst that could have befallen her, as to justify rebellion against her destinies.

But Sophia was only in her first lesson of the education of the heart. By degrees, she found that, though she might content herself with a due discharge of the duties of her mission as a wife, a mother, a member of the community, it was difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile them with the exactions arising from the worldly-mindedness of her husband. She was required to sacrifice her influence over her children and enjoyment of their society to his notions of the formal propriety becoming his situation in life; to select her associates in deference to his pecuniary interests; to regulate her loves and likings according to the fluctuations of the money-market; convert life into a speculation; and, even in the holy retirement of the country, calculate her acts of benevolence so as at once to benefit the firm, and substantiate her husband's position in the county of Warwick. Having discovered all this, Sophia could no longer disguise from herself that her early marriage had perilled her happiness in this world—perhaps in the next.

To conceal the discovery from her own family and the world was her first consideration. Never, in a single instance, had she swerved in deference towards the husband of her children. If an unhappy, she was never a complaining wife.

Meanwhile she had ample consolations. The time must come when her children would afford her the companionship her heart so much needed. Their personal and moral endowments were such as to gratify, meanwhile, her utmost maternal pride; and with such prospects before her, she became fortified in her patient forbearance.

But scarcely had the period of their maturity arrived, when she was beset by new apprehensions. In the handsome Walter, the idol of his father's vanity as the future head of the firm and owner of Dean Park, she soon discerned fatal traces of the influence of the world-seeking education bestowed upon him by his father. Her affection for her warm-hearted girl, on the other hand, was frustrated by the jealousy and mistrust of Mr. Hamlyn; and she now foresaw, in the connexion of Colonel Hamilton with the family, an endless source of mistrust and disputation.

But it was a still deeper cause for apprehension that at present depressed the heart of the thoughtful mother. Aware that the man, so mild and self-controlled under the observation of society, could, if opposed, indulge in private in the most frantic irritation, she trembled at the idea that the most gifted, if not most beloved of her children, was about to incur, for the first time, the penalty of filial disobedience. Her son Henry was on the eve of drawing down upon himself the utmost violence of parental displeasure.

While his two sons were still arrayed in jackets and nankeen trousers, Hamlyn, after the fashion of most modern fathers, had decided upon their future career. Walter was to succeed him in the borough and banking-house, an eldest son in every sense of the word; Henry to go out to India, under the auspices of his maternal uncle, an India Director. But the banker, far-sighted as he was, was fated to defeat his own projects.

"You will, of course, send your eldest son to Eton? Eton is the only place for making connexions. I would not have sent Vernon to any other school than Eton for millions," sounded, on the part of the old Lord Vernon, too friendly an admonition to be disregarded; and from Eton to Oxford the transition was inevitable. The future member for Barsthorpe was accordingly entered at Christ Church; and as his prepossessing exterior and handsome allowance recommended him to what was called the first society of the University, the heir of Dean Park speedily contracted such aristocratic tastes and predilections as, on the attainment of his majority, created a demand of some thousands upon his father for his losses at hazard and on the turf. Legal claim there was none; but the harpies who prey upon the boyish vices of the University represented so clamorously that the credit of Messrs. Hamlyn, of Lombard-street, and the honour of Squire Hamlyn, of Dean Park, were inextricably involved in the issue, that the worldly-wise banker conceived it more prudent to be a silent victim.

On such trying occasions, most fathers indulge in an outburst of fury and insult that suffices to provoke farther rebellion on the part of the prodigal. Richard Hamlyn bore it like a Spartan, or, rather, like a banker; and his system of cold-blooded self-command afforded him singular advantages over the offender. Walter was touched by what he considered his father's generous forbearance; and, affected above all by his ready payment of claims which the letter of the law enabled him to dishonour, resolved to accept with respect whatever penalty might be imposed upon his fault.

Thus prepared, it was a considerable relief to his apprehensions to learn that his punishment consisted in expulsion from his father's lucrative career—an object of abhorrence to himself, and contempt to his fashionable associates.

"The irregularity of your conduct in this money transaction," observed Mr. Hamlyn to his son, in his usual mild, benevolent tone, "evinces such total deficiency of the principles I had hoped to find you—principles doubly and vitally important in a man devoted to the responsible career in which your father and grandfather have acquired the respect of the commercial world—that I *dare* not place the interests of my constituents in your hands. Henry, therefore, will take the place reserved for you in the firm. *You* must content yourself with the army."

A gleam of joy irradiated the eyes of the young Oxonian. But the visions of a guardsman's St. James's-street life, which were the origin of his self-gratulation, faded in a moment on learning that he was to be an ensign in a marching regiment; and that, in the event of his exceeding his allowance, or compromising anew his father's credit as a man of business, his bills on the firm would be dishonoured without hesitation.

To this terrible denunciation the prodigal son had the good grace to submit without a murmur.

To be gazetted into a marching regiment was mortifying enough; but, on the whole, it was less vilifying than the city. The subservience in which he had been reared by his father towards the opinions of the Hyde had brought forth such good fruit, that even at Eton Walter had been put utterly out of conceit of his prospects in life by the name of "Young Discount" bestowed upon him by his lordly companions; and, satisfied that his father had too much value for his own consequence in life to leave his son and heir exposed to the chance of being sent to Sydney or Jamaica, submitted so prudently to the sentence imposed upon him, that, twelve months afterward, the enfranchised ensign had progressed into a cornet of the Household Brigade.

Henry, meanwhile, whose fortunes were thus satisfactorily subverted, was not sorry to exchange his prospects of banishment from his family and friends for the certainty of a provision at home. Henry Hamlyn was a noble fellow. Less gifted in person than his singularly handsome brother, his mental accomplishments were of a far higher order. The darling of Mrs. Hamlyn, the idol of his sisters, as if in vindication of the unjust favouritism which rendered the heir of Dean an object of exclusive interest to his father, Henry was the only member of the family over whom its methodical routine had exercised no unfavourable influence. Guileless and fearless as a child, enthusiastic as a woman, in the days when there were no poets on the earth he would probably have become a poet. As it was—but Mrs. Hamlyn never allowed herself, even in the depths of her heart, to reflect how little he was calculated to become a banker.

On learning at Haileybury his sentence of reprieve from India, Henry had been enchanted, and received with affectionate joy the eager congratulations of his mother that they were never to lose sight of each other.

"You will see, mother," said he, exultingly, "that in time I shall make a capital banker. In the spirit of contradiction, I suppose, I have always had a great leaning towards the vocation. Such a position as my father's is not sufficiently appreciated; such a position as my father's is a most important one; requiring the exercise of the highest faculties, and a thousand virtues, beginning with that of patience. Think of the number of persons a banker has it in his power to oblige—to assist from indigence into prosperity—to reclaim, to comfort! Think of the number of important schemes he is able to forward into existence; the number of useful inventions —of—"

"My dear Henry," remonstrated his mother, "you are, as usual, too enthusiastic! Unless your views become more practical, you will make me tremble for you and for the firm."

"Don't be afraid. For some time, at least, your flighty boy's hands will be tied, and he will be unable to do mischief. Besides, with such an example ever before me as my father's prudence, my father's integrity, my father's usefulness, my father's good citizenship, it will be hard, dearest mother, if I do not progress into a model-banker, and the best man of business in the United Kingdom."

Such were the dispositions of Henry Hamlyn at nineteen. Unluckily, the harangues of the late Lord Vernon in favour of the necessity of a college education to every young man destined to figure in Parliament, had not lost their posthumous influence over the mind of his neighbour at Dean Park. To increase the connexions of the family, Cambridge was preferred to Oxford for the second son; and at Cambridge Henry speedily afforded evidence of such rare abilities as signalized his name in the University beyond all expectation.

But in proportion as his scholarship and its honours increased, his zeal for the vocation of money-making became less ardent. The slavery and abject occupations of a banking-house appalled him. With a decided taste for literature, and a passionate love of travel, how was he to reconcile the routine of a city life, or the devotion to business which he knew would be exacted by his father?

At every fresh avowal of these sentiments, Mrs. Hamlyn, to whom alone his disgusts were confided, implored him to exercise his high faculties of mind in the noblest manner, by submitting to the career appointed for him by Providence and his father. She entreated him at least to forbear from any precipitate declarations—to make the attempt; satisfied that, once embarked in his calling, the usual influence of Mr. Hamlyn's calm but potent despotism would prevail, and that he would unconsciously sink into subordination.

Unfortunately, an excursion to Italy between his Cambridge terms more than ever unsettled his mind, and Henry was now on the eve of taking his degree; resolved that if, according to general expectation, it proved a high honour, he would seize the opportunity of throwing himself on his father's indulgence, and imploring redemption from a career of all others the most distasteful to his feelings.

Such was the dilemma which now wrung tears of bitterness from the gentle eyes of Mrs. Hamlyn, of Dean Park. All she had hitherto undergone was nothing to the trials she might henceforward have to bear, in the persons of her children. She had not courage to contemplate the vials of wrath about to be poured upon the head of the imprudent Henry!

Till that moment she had never allowed herself to appreciate all that was repellant in the character of her husband.

CHAPTER V.

We understand the splendid host intends
To entertain this Christmas a select
And numerous party of his noble friends:
'Midst whom we've heard, from sources quite correct,
The Duke of D. his shooting season spends,
With many more by rank and fashion decked.
Morning Post loquitur in
BYRON.

By a singular weakness in the character of the prudent banker, though fully conscious of the superior abilities of his second son, the member of his family of whose understanding he thought least highly was the only one who possessed the least influence over his mind, while the son who had seriously thwarted his projects was the only one who had any real ascendency over his heart.

Walter Hamlyn, though vain and frivolous, was one of the most popular young men of the day. His good manners and personal attractions rendered him a general favourite. Manly

as well as gentlemanly, his athletic address in the field and tennis-court recommended him at Oxford and in town to the fellowship of the most fashionable young men of the day. "Hamlyn of the Blues" was, in short, a known man; member of several of the best clubs, and moving in the highest circles of London society.

That under such circumstances he should consider himself a personage of first-rate importance was not very wonderful. Most empty-headed fellows think the same. The wonder was that the steady banker of Lombard-street should share his infatuation. For Hamlyn was proud of Walter; proud of his acceptance in society; proud of the connexions he had formed; proud of Walter's pride in his own position. In *his* person, the honours of Dean Park were sure to experience augmentation. Lord Vernon and his family would never presume to extend their disparagements to a fashionable young man like Hamlyn of the Blues.

That he had personally neglected the opportunity of promoting himself in life by an interested marriage, had long been a source of regret to the ambitious banker. But he felt satisfied that his future representative would effect something for the emblazonment of the family escutcheon, by connecting himself, at some future time, with the Order, the object of his jealous worship at the Hyde.

Though Richard Hamlyn kept cautious guard over himself against any betrayal of these weaknesses, the unconscionable value he affixed to his fashionable son caused him to render the epochs of Walter's visits matters of the highest moment at Dean Park. Even in Colonel Hamilton's presence he was unable to disguise this weakness; but the good old man, attributing Hamlyn's constantly recurring phrase of "We will talk of it when my son Walter arrives"—"Walter will settle what horse would be safest for the sledge"—or "Better not think of a ball till Walter has informed us how long he can stay!"—to a father's natural partiality for his firstborn, smiled aside at Lydia whenever his friend repeated the too-often reiterated name of "Walter."

"It is clear," said Colonel Hamilton, with a knowing glance, "that my young master is top-sawyer at Dean Park."

On the other hand, the banker had either enlarged considerably in his letters to Windsor on the importance of conciliating their new neighbour, or the gossip of the world had magnified fourfold the cipher of the colonel's fortune; for the fine gentleman of the Blues astonished his valet and his boots considerably by walking over with his father to the Manor within a couple of hours of his arrival at home, even before he had examined the weekly card of the appointments of the Ormeau hounds.

By the results of the visit, the banker's hopes were almost exceeded. The easy good-will of the old soldier was instantly conciliated by the easy good manners of the young one, and the spell attached to the gentlemanly demeanour of the handsome Captain Hamlyn wrought its usual miracle in his favour. His egotism was, in fact, so quiet, so free from fuss or ostentation, that it had the art of passing unnoticed. In this, the age of selfishness, there exist almost as many varieties as of dahlias or piccotees; and ordinary minds being on their guard only against the loud, outspoken selfishness that appropriates the thigh of the woodcock, the wing of the chicken, and the best place by the fire, less glaring demonstrations of the same vice, the silent egotisms of personal vanity, intellectual pride, domestic self-seclusion, sordid calculation, and divers others, glide through the world undetected, or arrayed in the mask and domino of virtue.

Colonel Hamilton was not a sufficiently nice observer to discover that Captain Hamlyn, instead of considering himself a part of his family, considered his family a portion of himself; that he looked upon the firm of Hamlyn and Co., of Lombard-street, as the mere springs and wheels of a timepiece, whereof the handsome captain in the Blues constituted the enamelled dial.

But if the designing banker triumphed in the result of his son's visit to Burlington, Walter was thoroughly disgusted. A few hurried interviews in London had not prepared him for the reckless, good-humoured familiarity of the man thus established in the bosom of his family. He was annoyed at the idea of exhibiting the unpolished eccentricities of Hamilton to the quizzing of his young friend Lord Dartford, and his noble relatives. But, above all, he was deeply vexed to think of the impression their intimacy with this strange old man might create on the minds of the Vernons.

"We really are not sufficiently well established in the county to commit ourselves by responsibility for the oddities of a man so ignorant of the common forms of the world," was his secret reflection on quitting Burlington Hatch. "However, my father knows what he is about better than most men; and, since he decides old Hamilton's company to be an inevitable evil, I fear we must submit. A vulgar uncle or godfather, if equally rich, were supportable; for the gift of a hundred-pound note, or a charger now and then, would plead his apology. But a stranger, a man from whom one can accept nothing in return for being bored, is a charge beyond permission. I heartily wish this Christmas party were over, and the Rotherwoods relieved from the *corvée* of old Hamilton's vulgar jocularity."

To live in the world without the faculty of observation advances a man no farther in tact than to spend his days at Ghazerapore; and poor Walter, though established in the coteries of fashionable life, understood quite as little of their impulses as the simple-hearted object of his contempt. With the noble guests who, in the course of the day, assembled at Dean Park, Colonel Hamilton had the greatest success. So far from being shocked at his bluntness, the Rotherwoods were inexpressibly amused by the sallies of a person so untrammelled by the monotonizing influences of fashionable life. As something exceedingly new to them, he was exceedingly welcome; and his pungent criticisms upon the follies of the day were applauded by involuntary bursts of merriment, such as had never before echoed under the stuccoed ceilings of Dean Park.

Lord Crawley, on the other hand, a man who had set up for statesmanship on a shallow stock of reading and information, and whose knowledge consisted of facts ably abstracted from the experience of others, contrived, in the course of their first day's gossip, to extract a world of information from the colonel touching the seat of war in India, and the state of public opinion in the East. While Walter Hamlyn was endeav-

ouring to cover, by dexterous manœuvres, the quizzicalities of the oldfashioned Nabob's method of taking wine at dinner and dealing at whist—peculiarities of no moment in the eyes of people of the world—Lord Crawley and his noble brother-in-law were chiefly anxious that the trifling young man they tolerated as their banker's son should hold his peace, that they might give their attention to the amusing anecdotes of the veteran.

Even Mrs. Hamlyn, though far superior to the weakness of blushing for a homely guest because she happened to have great personages under her roof, had been a little apprehensive that the Oriental anecdotes, so often repeated at Dean Park, might prove as tedious to her visiters as to herself.

"Afraid I shall be tired of listening to Colonel Hamilton's amusing Indian stories!" exclaimed Lady Rotherwood, to whom she expressed her apprehensions. "Are you in earnest?" Why, I never heard anything so interesting in my life! What an agreeable, chatty old man! and how much of the world he has seen!"

Mrs. Hamlyn, accustomed in her own family to hear Colonel Hamilton's oddities attributed to having seen *nothing* of "the world," could scarcely refrain from a smile. The good-natured countess's interpretation of the word was clearly that of the Statistical Society rather than of Almack's!

"It is like reading an amusing book to talk to Colonel Hamilton," persisted Lady Rotherwood; "I literally held my breath, last night, when he was giving us that charming account of the lion-hunt at Chinderabad!"

Sophia, who had been listening three times a week to this very narrative for the last six months, as one of the colonel's crack stories, and been debarred by politeness only from interrupting what she feared must form a disagreeable obstacle to the political discussions of the parliamentary men present, recognised her own misconception. It had not before struck her that the eminence of Lady Rotherwood's position in life rendered a thousand things new and strange to *her* which constituted the stale daily bread of Cavendish Square and Dean Park. Refined to inanity in her habits of life, the excitement afforded by the hair-breadth-'scape inventions of a novelist, or the stirring anecdotes of a pilgrim in the wilderness, such as Colonel Hamilton, was an agreeable relief to the ennui of the languid countess.

"When my nephew joins us," she observed, on the eve of Lord Dartford's arrival, "I entreat you, my dear Mrs. Hamlyn, to get that dear old man once more into the Ghaznapore chapter. Dartford has not heard the stories of the Lion Hunt, or the Natch-girl, or the Serpent Charmer, and will be absolutely enchanted. Captain Hamlyn! *pray* promise me the Lion Hunt for your friend Dartford. My nephew is such an enthusiastic sportsman! My nephew will delight in your lively, chatty old neighbour!"

Thus encouraged, Colonel Hamilton became the star of the little party; and the enthusiasm of his auditory seemed to develop a thousand new or forgotten sources of information. Beset by the young marquis with inquiries concerning the wild sports of the East—by Lord Crawley, touching its tribunals and institutions—by the countess regarding its climate, fruits, and flowers, its suttees and incantations—his replies were so fluent and so varied, that Walter Hamlyn had the mortification of finding the evening pass away without a single allusion to London politics or fashionable scandal, in which he fancied himself qualified to take a distinguished part.

Farther consideration satisfied him that, since it was his object to render his father's house agreeable to the society prized by the London banker only as conferring importance upon Dean Park in the eyes of the county, and enabling him to make a stand against the impertinence of the Vernons, they might consider themselves lucky that, while following up their system of courtesy to the nabob, they had unconsciously engaged for the amusement of their friends a first-rate conversation man!

In the sequel, the Rotherwoods were persuaded to stay a day longer than they had promised, for the sole purpose of a visit to the Oriental museum of their new friend at Burlington Manor. As to the Marquis of Dartford, he was half afraid of allowing it to be perceived how much he considered Dean Park (which on a former visit he had felt to be the acmé of dulness and formality, endured only in deference to its vicinity to the Ormeau kennel) improved by the accession of a neighbour whose warmth and singleness of heart might have infused sociability into a gallery of statues.

On the morning fixed for the Rotherwoods' departure, Walter found the countess so exclusively engrossed by her pet wonder-monger that he could find no opportunity to pay her his parting compliments.

"What *can* Colonel Hamilton be bothering Lady Rotherwood about now?" he exclaimed, pettishly, to his sister Lydia, who, at the instigation of her indulgent friend, had been admitted into the party.

"Excusing himself from accompanying my father and mother, next week, to Rotherwood Castle."

"You do not mean that the Rotherwoods have invited old Hamilton?"

"Urgently. There is to be a *battue*—"

"But he is no sportsman; and I and Dartford have not heard a word of it!" interrupted Walter.

"Perhaps Lord Rotherwood may not wish to have too many sportsmen of the party."

"But what on earth would poor old Hamilton do in the midst of a circle of official men, like that assembled at Rotherwood Castle?"

"Just what I heard him answer. He said he would rather visit Lord and Lady Rotherwood when they were alone, and sociable; that he liked a snug party best!"

"What a man!" ejaculated Walter, shrugging his shoulders. "And what must Lady Rotherwood have thought of him?"

"Probably that he paid her house a great compliment! It is not often the Rotherwoods have found their company preferred to their pheasant-shooting."

"How little are such people to be depended upon!" was Captain Hamlyn's secret reflection. "The last time the Rotherwoods were here, my father was at the trouble of inviting the most amusing set in London to meet them: Flimflam, the reviewer, and Augustus Brag, the best chit-chatterer in town; yet Lady Rotherwood never came down to breakfast, and was, I suspect, bored to death! And *now*, to be *engouée* by this dreadful old bore! *Caprice de grande dame*, I suppose! It will be most annoying, however,

if she should not ask me to the castle for this *battue;* for I understood, and gave Dartford to understand, that I was to accompany my father."

At that moment Lady Rotherwood advanced towards Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn with her parting compliments, the travelling carriage having been announced; and Walter, overhearing cordial expressions of hospitality, felt satisfied that all was right.

He was mistaken, however, and disappointed. "I will not hear of her being left at home," were the unwelcome words that met his ear. "Colonel Hamilton has just been telling me," continued the countess, glancing kindly towards Lydia, in answer to her mother's excuses for the "unpresented" young lady, 'that she is the most charming companion in the world!' that he does not know how he should get on without her!"

To refuse the pressing invitation that followed was impossible. But no sooner had the Rotherwoods departed, and Colonel Hamilton and the two young sportsmen left the room, than the wrath of Mr. Hamlyn exploded.

"Lydia invited in the place of her brother!" cried he; "a most unaccountable slight to be offered to my son, and to be offered in Colonel Hamilton's presence. But I have to thank *you* for it!" he continued, angrily, addressing his wife. "It is all the result of your most mistaken and pernicious system! Unable to invite the whole party, it was inevitable that Lady Rotherwood must give the preference to one whom you chose to impose upon her as a woman!"

"Indeed, dear papa, I would a thousand times rather stay at home," pleaded Lydia, tears filling her eyes at hearing, for the first time in her life, her kind mother reprehended. But Mrs. Hamlyn, dreading to see the wrath she had incurred transferred to her daughter, for the presumption of having a choice on so grave a subject, instantly dismissed the offender to her practising.

"Next year," said she, when the door had closed upon the poor girl, "Lydia will, of necessity, accompany us everywhere, and Walter experience the same chance as a supernumerary."

"Next year I shall care nothing about the matter! Next year the Rotherwoods may follow their own senseless fancies. At present, it is *essential* that Walter should stand on the highest ground in the estimation of Colonel Hamilton."

"Forgive me for saying that I believe Colonel Hamilton to be wholly above being influenced by the notice of great people!" mildly rejoined Mrs. Hamlyn.

"Not of great people whom he respects," retorted Hamlyn, biting his lips, which were growing paler and paler. "Do you suppose that, in the choice of an heir to his property, he would not be influenced by the worldly standing of a young man whom he knows only from report? On settling in Warwickshire, he finds us slighted—pointedly slighted—by the leading family of the neighbourhood; and it was on the courtesies of the Rotherwoods I depended, as the most effectual counterbalance to the evil. Look at the result—the result brought about by your imprudence! The Vernons are expected down to-day, and in a week's time Hamilton will have discovered us to be on distant terms of civility, more humiliating than a decided cut!" added Mr. Hamlyn, in a tone of bitterness.

"He is aware that we associate familiarly with their equals in station and respectability," urged his wife.

"Fifty Earls of Rotherwood in distant counties do not amount in value to Lord Vernon, residing almost in the same parish. Hamilton will have a right to conclude that these people know something to my discredit. Ten to one that, while keeping *us* at a distance, they will be extremely civil to *him* as a stranger in the county."

"I see no possible line of connexion between them."

"There is always a line of connexion between country neighbours whose lands adjoin: foxes to preserve, poachers to repel, trespassers to prosecute. Barlow threw out a feeler by his attention about the keys of the park. Lord Vernon expects to be lord-lieutenant of the county, and a man of Hamilton's fortune is *always* an object for conciliation."

"On his first arrival, you seemed anxious that his residence here should become as pleasant as possible."

"Of course, as a means of uniting him more closely with ourselves. Consider what might be the consequence, were he left to run about the country in search of amusement, making promiscuous acquaintance at watering-places! But I neither wish to see him *fêted* by the Rotherwoods at Walter's expense, nor by the Vernons, in whose house he would be sure to hear us named slightingly."

"By the Vernons, I am convinced his opinion would be uninfluenced," cried Mrs. Hamlyn, warmly.

"Few people are sufficiently firm to remain uninfluenced by hearing persons daily disparaged. At all events, to become intimate at the Hyde would estrange him from our fireside, where it is essential to me he should be anchored—at least till Walter's interests are secure. I shall give him vaguely to understand, however, that my son expressly avoided an invitation to Rotherwood Castle."

The wistful expression of Mrs. Hamlyn's countenance evinced her disgust at any attempt at imposition on their frank-hearted friend. But her husband might have spared his designs! At the desire of Colonel Hamilton, the two young men, in the course of their morning's shooting, had taken luncheon at the Hyde, and while pledging his cordial host in an equally cordial bumper of old Madeira, Lord Dartford's discontents had burst forth.

"And so, my dear sir," cried he to Colonel Hamilton, "this audacious aunt and uncle of mine have invited *you* to a *battue*, and presumed to omit Walter and myself? I feel outrageously insulted, both in my own person and my friend's. What can they mean by it? Though I *had* the ill luck to shoot Lord Rotherwood's favourite setter by mistake, the last time I entered his preserves, I sha'n't stand being snubbed by my own lawful uncle. Unless he make amends by an early invitation, I have serious thoughts of cutting him off with a shilling!"

"Never mind, never mind," was Colonel Hamilton's cheerful exhortation in reply. "If this weather last, you'll have little to regret in the *battue;* and if it don't, why, as you informed me, my lord, you had given up an expedition to Italy this winter solely that you might enjoy the sport of fox-hunting, you'll amuse yourself a plaguy deal better with the Ormeau hounds than in shooting the setters of the earl."

"I *do* prefer hunting to shooting, certainly, and I suppose my uncle will make that preference a pretext for his rudeness," cried Lord Dartford. "But there would have been no harm in giving one the option, eh, Hamlyn?" continued he, addressing Walter, who was deep in his own reflections and a chicken-pie. "For my part, I would give the best run the Duke of Elvaston is likely to have this season for the certainty of a pleasant party, such as will be assembled next week at Rotherwood Castle."

"Oh! oh!" cried Colonel Hamilton, who, like most jovial old gentlemen, was apt to suspect a pretty girl as the latent object of every good-looking young gentleman, "I'm beginning to see *now* what sort of bird you're wanting to take aim at at Rotherwood Castle! But if that's the case, my lord, why not be satisfied where you are? Haven't you the game in your own hands, pray, at Dean Park?"

Walter Hamlyn, shocked by the indiscretion of this allusion, yet aware that to silence the old man's reckless garrulity when once an idea had taken possession of his fancy was out of the question, attempted to change the conversation by exaggerated praise of Hodgson's pale ale at table, which was the object of his disgust. But the attention of Colonel Hamilton was not so easily diverted.

"Ay, ay! I knew Hodgson would make a convert of you in time," cried he. "Worth hogsheads of your heavy home-brewed! The Dean Park ale sends me to sleep like one of Twaddlem's speeches. I'm expecting my new sledge over from Birmingham," continued he, turning to the marquis; "and by George, my lord, you and Miss Lydia shall have the seasoning of it. I'll send it to Dean to-morrow after breakfast; and as the park roads are famously beaten by the coals they've been leading this morning, you can't do better than refresh my old eyes with a sight of you both, by driving to Burlington to lunch. A snug drive in the snow, eh! my lord? No cross chaperon, no fussy governess, only two happy young faces glowing in the frosty air. Well! what say ye to my proposition."

"A tempting one, certainly," replied Lord Dartford, more embarrassed than he had ever felt in his life by this indiscreet allusion, in the presence of Lydia's brother, to a preference he had scarcely yet avowed even to himself. "The only obstacle is the improbability of Miss Hamlyn's accepting it, and the *impossibility* of my even venturing to name it at Dean Park."

"Pho, pho, pho! What is there to prevent two young people from enjoying a harmless diversion, pray, who have a mind to each other's company? A hundred miles, too, from the prying and scandal-mongering of Lon'on? Where's the harm of a drive, I should like to know?"

"None, I hope, my dear sir!" cried Lord Dartford, rising from table, and snatching up his shooting-cap to depart. "For which reason, I trust you will not forget your kind offer of the sledge, that I may make an attempt to enjoy one with Mrs. Hamlyn, if she will do me honour of trusting my sledgemanship. Priority of age, you know! Mrs. Hamlyn and I first, her son and daughter next. I have a year and two months the advantage over Walter there, and claim precedency with the new toy. Come, Hamlyn, we shall have just time for the coveys we marked down in the turnips as we go home."

On their way back to Dean Park, Walter Hamlyn made divers attempts at apology for the eccentricities of their host. But Dartford discouraged all by pronouncing him, in round terms, to be "a capital old fellow."

"What an acquisition you must find him in your thin neighbourhood!" exclaimed the marquis. "When I heard from Copington that you were to have the Vernons here this winter, I really pitied you! Lady Vernon and her daughter are the two most restless, plotting women of my acquaintance! Lord Vernon is a pompous cipher, an 'in-the-name of the prophet, Figs' sort of fellow; and Alberic, a Frenchified prig! I could not stand such neighbours as the Vernons. But this pleasant, open-hearted old soldier is really a resource."

Walter Hamlyn, the ambition of whose life it was to become the bosom friend of the Frenchified prig—the favoured admirer of the restless, plotting girl—replied evasively that, as the Vernons lived chiefly in Northumberland, and there were election feuds between the families, their comings or goings were a matter of no moment to Dean Park.

So thoroughly disingenuous, however, was this statement, that at that very moment the banker was engaged in deliberating on the day and the hour when, without positive compromise of his dignity, it became him to leave a card of courtesy on his arrival upon the unconciliating peer with whom he was forced to keep up the semblance of neighbourship, tidings having already reached him that the family coach of the Vernons had been seen making its dogged way along the Ovington road, bringing the august family to spend a discontented winter at the Hyde.

Though the severe definition hazarded by the young marquis of Lord Vernon was somewhat exaggerated, it would have been difficult to point out a man less happy in himself, or less disposed to administer to the happiness of others. A victim to the moral dyspepsy arising from the repletion of prosperity, the great man murmured away his useless life, ringing the golden bells of his gorgeous rattle with as doleful a measure as though they were solemnizing a funeral.

The sullen discontent of his lordship did not rise, indeed, to the dignity of misanthropy, or pretend to base itself on consciousness of personal superiority. But whereas his father, the late noble lord, had enjoyed estates to the value of thirty thousand a year, he thought himself a much injured man to succeed to two thirds only of that amount, in consequence of the absorptions of a long dowagerhood, and superabounding family of brothers and sisters. But had Lord Vernon been quite candid with himself, which few people *are* in this world, he would have admitted that his chief quarrel against destiny consisted in the good old age to which his father had survived.

"I did not come into my property," was one of his favourite complaints, "till I was past the age for enjoying it." To which he did not think it necessary to add that, when at length made a happy man by the death of his octogenarian parent, he had considerably encumbered an already diminished rent-roll by the amount of his post-obits.

Concerning the only real calamity of his life he was equally silent: the fact, namely, that soon after attaining his majority he had become a dupe to the designs of a fashionable match-hunter, who, having falsely estimated the eldest

son of a peer having already numbered three-score years as an excellent *parti*, resented it almost as a crime against herself and her children when, a few years afterward, the old lord saw fit to discountenance her appraisements by a second marriage, followed by a numerous progeny. This worldly-minded wife had exercised, through life, considerable influence over the shallow mind of her husband; and, compelled to pass the first twenty years of their married life in modest competence, in lieu of the brilliant existence they had mutually projected, Lord Vernon, when at length his venerable parent obliged him by dropping into the grave, had lost the power of enjoying with due zest the death of his father. Such, at least, was the plain English interpretation of his murmurs. Indignant as he would have been had any one now suggested that *his* survival might become an obstacle to the pleasures of his children, certain it is that his father's length of days had been a burden to *him*. Let Christian moralists determine whether such sentiments on the part of an enlightened man be not more culpable in the sight of God than the outrages of physical violence so heavily visited in lower life by the retributive justice of the law.

Until, at the age of forty-five, Lord Vernon accomplished the long-coveted enjoyment of what he called independence—namely, a house in town, three country-seats, and a suitable establishment—his poverty seemed to afford sufficient subject for his grumblings. His "wretched allowance" (of three thousand a year), scarcely enabling him to enjoy his hunting in Leicestershire, maintain his son at college, and bestow upon his pretty affected daughter her due excess of the superficial accomplishments of the day, placed him, in his own estimation, in indigent circumstances. But on the attainment of twenty thousand per annum, albeit the annual amount of seven thousand had been abstracted for evermore from the family rent-roll by the weakness of the old lord in favour of his junior branches, it seemed almost time he should find some more legitimate cause for discontent than pecuniary distress.

A new evil opportunely presented itself. Government began to use Lord Vernon almost as ill by its precariousness as his father had done by his longevity. The administration to which, for many years past, he had pawned his vote in Parliament, on the private understanding of receiving an earldom, in redemption, on the death of his father, thought proper to resign a few months previous to that long-procrastinated event—with malice prepense, of course. Ministers *could* have no stronger incentive for their resignation of office than to baffle the ambition of a newly-inheriting peer.

Conscious that he had forborne to press his father's advancement to the earldom, solely under an apprehension that the old man might be tempted to increase the portions of his eight daughters when promoted into ladyships, Lord Vernon felt too angry with himself for having allowed the long-coveted object to slip through his fingers, not to contemplate the addition to his family honours with increased and increasing avidity. The gloomy turn of countenance acquired by brooding over his domestic calamities during the lifetime of the late lord became, accordingly, more morose than ever; till the world, unaware of his secret sources of dissatisfaction, began to attribute to pride his lordship's ill-humoured reserve. The surliness of a great man who has no justifying or ostensible cause for being out of sorts is usually so attributed.

Nevertheless, the individual supposed by his country neighbours to wear so sour a visage simply because qualified by the peerage as "John, fourteenth Lord Vernon," stood in reality so low in his own conceit, that he thought himself nothing because unable to accomplish the coveted object of writing himself down John, the first earl. He clearly felt that he should have lived in vain unless he achieved a step of precedency over his predecessor.

The very motive of his lordship's preference of Vernon Castle as a residence over the Hyde was of similar instigation. So far from caring about the sociability of the neighbourhood, or despising the Warwickshire squirearchy, he took less pleasure in his ancient seat only because overshadowed in the county by the superior distinctions of his noble neighbours at Ormeau. The Duke of Elvaston was a greater personage than himself, and a more popular person. Having succeeded to his family honours at an early age, his grace's connexion with the neighbourhood was an affair of forty years long; and he had, consequently, obliged twenty times as many people as Lord Vernon, and given away ninety-and-nine times as many haunches of venison to the rich, and chaldrons of coals to the poor. Moreover, the duke had one of the best seats in England, and was master of a crack pack of fox-hounds; and Lord Vernon, even had he been a worthier and better-tempered man, might have vainly attempted to contend against these truly great British elements of popularity.

Next to the superior greatness of Ormeau, Lord Vernon was jealous of the officious activity of Dean Park. In his rare visits to the Hyde during the lifetime of his father, he had always felt annoyed at meeting among the guests a man, a banker, who presumed to differ in politics from the noble house of Vernon; a house already moss-grown with antiquity at a time when that of Dean Park was still an unenclosed common; and now that he bore in his own person the dignities of the peerage, he intended, by his chilling reserve, to replace the individual who exercised such unjustifiable influence in that part of the county, in the obscurity he considered to be Richard Hamlyn's appropriate element. The Duke of Elvaston was, in short, the upas over his head, and Hamlyn the fungus at his feet.

The offspring of Lord and Lady Vernon partook of the nature of their parents, and were of the world, worldly. To form a desirable matrimonial connexion was the object of the one, to avoid a disadvantageous one the object of the other. From the day Lucinda Vernon was presented, it had been the absorbing ambition of the *débutante* and her mother to hail her as a marchioness; and the son of the Duke of Elvaston happening to be married, they mutually shared Lord Vernon's antipathy to a neighbourhood presenting no facilities for the realization of their favourite project.

Under such circumstances, the beautiful seat of the Hyde might, perhaps, have been altogether deserted by its ungrateful proprietor but for the influence of the son and heir over the mind of his mother. Alberic Vernon, by dexterous allusions to the improvidence of an ab-

senteeism that might have the effect of excluding his father from the lord-lieutenancy, which he represented as a step towards the earldom, continued to bring his parents, during the hunting season, within reach of the advantages of Ormeau.

That the environs of the Hyde contained *more* than the Ormeau fox-hounds, not one of the party cared to remember. The indigenous families were no more in their estimation than the oaks or beeches of the neighbourhood — its cauliflowers or spinach; people with whom they had no interest in common—no possible connexion. With the exception of the Hamlyns of Dean Park, none of them were even specific enough to be hateful.

Whenever questioned in Northumberland or town touching their Warwickshire neighbours, Lady Vernon or Lucinda would reply, "We have no one with whom we can associate, being out of visiting distance from Ormeau;" while Alberic was often heard to boast that the sole advantage of the Hyde was its utter isolation.

"No booby squires thereabouts, thank Heaven, to ride over the hounds, or try to hook one for their daughters. We have it all our own way at the Hyde."

Though Lady Vernon and her daughter had a slight ballroom acquaintance with Walter Hamlyn, there seemed so little affinity between the fashionable captain of the Blues, and the insignificant family at Dean Park that they had actually never been at the trouble of connecting him in their mind with their offending Warwickshire opponents.

The Vernons were now visiting the halls of their ancestors with renewed disgust. Her ladyship and her daughter had been vainly attempting to persuade Lord Vernon into passing the winter in Italy, in order to follow up at Rome what they fancied to be one of the promising match-hunts of the London season; while his lordship, frustrated in his hopes that a change of ministry was about to renew his prospects of promotion, felt more than usually aggrieved by the limited number of balls in his coronet. At such a moment, it required all the selfish perseverance of young Vernon to determine his father to come and be shone upon by the superior resplendence of Ormeau.

"My dear Inda, we must make some sacrifices to your brother!" was Lady Vernon's reply to the peevish remonstrances of the repining young lady. "Alberic cannot, of course, dispense with his hunting—it is the chief business of life to a young man of his age; and were your father to enable him to set up an independent establishment at the Hyde, we should be having him marry, or do some silly thing or other. No great sacrifice for us to spend six weeks there! Indeed, as we always get ill with the damp or dulness of the place, it will afford an excellent excuse for taking a house at Brighton, for Easter, to recruit our health."

"I suppose, then, we must make the best of it," sighed Miss Vernon, shrugging her shoulders. "One comfort is that there is no visiting, no going out, no call upon one's attention. So, with plenty of new novels from Ebers's, and a new piece of braidwork from Brydon's, I trust I may be able to get through my period of penance."

Before the expiration of a couple of days, the young lady began to assert this with less certainty of survival. Never had the Hyde appeared so insupportable. The weather was against them. A deep snow confined the Ormeau hounds to their kennel, and Lord Vernon and his son to their fireside; and Lucinda had all the *ennui* of her brother to support, in addition to her own. Lady Vernon, too, still smarting under her disappointments of the season in the non-marriage of her daughter, was forced to listen, hour after hour, to the ejaculations of the listless, useless, graceless husband, who protested that, from the moment he was born, he had been a football for the fates, and thwarted in all his objects of existence.

"It only required for me to determine to spend a few weeks at the Hyde to bring such a winter as this!" grumbled Lord Vernon, as he stood roasting himself before the breakfast-room fire. "But 'tis the last time I ever risk the annoyance. It is too absurd to be making the sacrifice of one's time and health in this detestable house, on pretence of giving Alberic his hunting, when the hounds will probably not be out of their kennel half a dozen times in as many weeks."

"My father always labours to impress upon me the vast self-sacrifice of his visit here," was the comment on this text, after Lord Vernon had left the room, of one who had been taught by his own parents the lesson of unfiliality. "But, after all, what but his own stinginess brings us to the Hyde? Were he to make a proper addition to my allowance, nothing would be more agreeable to *me* than to spend the winter at Melton. The Ormeau hounds are a very fair pack, the Ormeau county, is tolerable; but as Dartford was saying yesterday, the idea of comparing them with Melton is—"

"*Dartford?*" interrupted Lady Vernon, to whom, though apparently engaged in perusal of the Morning Post, her son's observations were addressed.

"He was saying to me yesterday, I observed," resumed her son, "that if—"

"*Lord Dartford* was saying to you yesterday?" again remorselessly interrupted her ladyship. "Why, where on earth did you see him?"

"At Ovington."

"Changing horses, of course! but I fancied he was half way to Italy by this time."

"He could not get leave, I fancy, for the scheme fell to the ground. He has been staying in this neighbourhood."

"At Ormeau, I conclude. How unreasonable it is, Alberic, that your father should persist in being on such unsociable terms with those people! It is all very well to give out in the neighbourhood we come here for retirement—do not wish to go out on account of your father's gout, and so forth; for there is not a soul within reach with whom we have the least object in associating. But there might surely be found some plea of exception for the Elvastons."

"I'm sure I don't know *why*. The Warwickshire people are unexceptionably odious, and the Ormeau set worst of all. As far as sporting goes, the duke is a valuable man, but his family bores are of the first magnitude. Those dreadful Irish nieces of the duchess, who are quartered at the Castle regularly every hunting season, in hopes that some unhappy fellow may be netted during a long frost, or when laid up with a broken collar-bone. No, no, my father is quite right to relieve us from the hospitalities of Ormeau."

"You never consider for a moment the in-

terests of your sister," cried Lady Vernon, pettishly.

"What advantage could Inda possibly derive at Ormeau? Cossington is married, poor fellow! and all the young men in the house are marked with a white cross, to be cut down for the Irish nieces."

"You very well know, however, what attention he paid to Inda last season."

"Who, Cossington?"

"What nonsense! I am talking of Lord Dartford."

"But what has Dartford to do with the Elvastons, mother?"

"You said you spoke to him yesterday, on his road from Ormeau."

"Indeed I said no such thing."

"What *did* you say, then?"

"That he advised me strongly to join him in February, at Melton."

"But where has he been staying, then, in Warwickshire?"

"At Hamlyn the banker's."

"How very strange! He can't be in difficulties already! What takes him to a banker's, I wonder?"

"The son is in the Blues, you know. Dartford is in Hamlyn's troop."

"That good-looking Captain Hamlyn we met at dinner at Elvaston House?"

"Precisely."

"Why did you never tell me so before? We ought to return those Dean Park people's visit. The grandfather was a great friend of the late Lord Vernon."

"Grandfather! I thought they were people of yesterday."

"And so they are; but Lord Vernon was what is called a good neighbour, that is, caring not a straw with whom he associated, so that he was sure of society. But I really believe these Hamlyns are inoffensive, good sort of people. How long was Lord Dartford there?"

"I did not ask him. Some days, I believe."

"How very provoking!"

"*Why* provoking?"

"Because we have been sitting over the fire for the last two mornings, wearying our hearts and souls out for want of something to do, and might just as well have driven over to Dean Park."

"In such weather?"

"What signifies weather when one has an object in view?"

"It signifies very much to the horses. And what object can you possibly have in driving, in a deep snow, to call upon a vulgar banker's vulgar wife?"

"To invite Lord Dartford here, to be sure."

"Take out your horses and servants in such weather to accomplish what a note by the post would have settled equally well."

"I beg your pardon. I should have had no objection to ask him to the Hyde in an offhand sort of way, but, on the terms we are, I do not choose to write him a formal letter of invitation. You know yourself, Alberic, what remarks you always make when asked to a country-house where there are unmarried daughters."

"That is, what remarks *you* make, mother, which *I* am forced to echo. However, if you really wish to invite Dartford in what you call an offhand sort of way (of all *impromptus fait à loisir* the most treacherous—a positive *guet-à-pens!*), you have still time. I met him yesterday at Ovington, not, as you surmised, changing horses; he was simply shopping for the people at Dean Park, buying a skein of white worsted, or some nonsense of that description. He is not off these three days."

"What can possibly keep him loitering on in such a house as that? Mrs. Hamlyn is a dull, motherly sort of woman; the daughters are not grown up. My dear Alberic, if you are going to the stables, say the carriage will be wanted after luncheon to drive over to Dean."

Mr. Vernon rang the bell, and reiterated the order to the groom of the chambers.

"I have too much regard for old Robson to make his wig stand on end by any such outrageous instructions," said he; and, on pretence of letters to write, he proceeded to shut himself up in his own room, to enjoy the morning, in an easy-chair before the fire, with his dog at his feet, a cigar in his mouth, and in his hand the last new novel of Eugène Sue.

Meanwhile, furred to the chin, and with their feet ensconced in well-warmed *Chancelières*, his mother and sister set forth upon their arctic expedition; a visit which, the preceding day, would have been pronounced as unaccomplishable as one of the labours of Hercules, having suddenly become a trifle light as air when connected with the castles in the air dependant upon the capture of a marquis.

CHAPTER VI.

If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows that he is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent joined to them. If he easily pardon and remit offences, it shows that his mind is planted above injuries. —Bacon.

Little aware of the motive of Lady Vernon's unusual condescension, Mrs. Hamlyn received her guests with a quiet courtesy that not even her husband's ardent desire to conciliate the family at the Hyde had ever availed to render servile. She was very sincere, however, in her expressions of regret that her ladyship should have attempted so long a drive in weather so severe, for the mere ceremony of a morning visit.

"I had business at Ovington, and a mile or two, more or less, makes no great difference," was the ill-bred explanation of the manœuvring lady, afraid that her latent object might be suspected, and scarcely knowing how to introduce the name of Lord Dartford, so as to ascertain whether her son's information were correct; for already she perceived herself mistaken in the supposition that the banker's wife would be unable to refrain from some allusion to so desirable a guest within the first ten minutes of their interview.

Mrs. Hamlyn's polite expressions of satisfaction at the return of the Vernon family to the Hyde were met with an equally ill grace.

"We scarcely hoped to have the pleasure of seeing your ladyship in Warwickshire this winter," observed the hostess. "The newspapers had announced that you were on the point of starting for Italy."

"Oh! pray do not mention it—the disappointment was too trying!" interrupted Miss Vernon, with an affected sigh. "After anticipating the delights of that charming climate, a winter in Warwickshire seems doubly insupportable. I *do* believe it always snows at the Hyde. Every

Christmas *we* have spent there, at least, the snow has been a foot deep on the ground."

And both mother and daughter fell upon their family place as ferociously as though poor Mrs. Hamlyn were accountable for all the crimes and misdemeanors of the county!

"For my part, I suffered so severely from rheumatism the last winter I spent at the Hyde," resumed Lady Vernon, languidly, "that I had fully made up my mind never again to set foot in the house, unless in summer, as a resting-place on our way to the North."

"The house is certainly better adapted for a summer residence," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, scarcely considering it civil to be too severe upon the family-seat of her visiter.

"Better *adapted?* Say rather more *bearable!*" retorted Miss Vernon, with a shudder. "I know nothing for which the Hyde is adapted, unless to figure in one of Charlotte Smith's equally old-fashioned novels. I found one yesterday in the library, describing the place as though the Hyde had sat for its picture!"

"It would, however, have been cruel upon my son to leave him alone there, his first winter in England," added Lady Vernon. "Alberic is passionately fond of hunting; and in these days everything is sacrificed *to* young people, and *by* young people to their pleasures. I dare say you have the mortification to find that Dean Park owes a considerable portion of its attraction, in the eyes of Captain Hamlyn, to its vicinity to Ormeau?"

This was the longest and civillest speech Mrs. Hamlyn had ever yet heard from the lips of Lady Vernon, who had not deigned to notice, on previous occasions, her relationship to Walter.

"My son is certainly fond of hunting," was Sophia's meek reply. "But later in the season he usually enjoys a few weeks at Melton."

"He is with you at present, however, I believe?" resumed Lady Vernon, fancying she was veering round unperceived towards the marquis.

"He will be here, I hope, till next week."

"In that case, pray tell him he must lose no time in riding over to see us at the Hyde," was the gracious rejoinder of the great lady. "Alberic and Captain Hamlyn were schoolfellows. But there is some difference of age between them; and my son has been so little in England, that he has had no opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of young men of his own standing: a circumstance I regret more especially in the case of those connected with him by the common ties of interest in the county. Perhaps Captain Hamlyn will come over to-morrow without ceremony, and dine and *sleep* at the Hyde? I am expecting my sister, Lady Middlebury, and her family."

"My son would doubtless have had much pleasure in accepting your ladyship's invitation," replied the astonished Mrs. Hamlyn, "but—"

Terrified by the sound of a disjunctive conjunction so sinister to her hopes, Lady Vernon, interrupting her hostess, recommenced her attack.

"Lord Vernon would have done himself the honour of calling on Mr. Hamlyn, or accompanying me here to-day," said she, "but he has, unfortunately, flying symptoms of gout, which confine him to the house. The last time he was at the Hyde he experienced a very severe attack."

"My son would, I am sure, have had great pleasure in waiting upon his lordship without any preliminary of the kind," resumed Mrs. Hamlyn, unable to account for this excess of courtesy, "but at present we have a friend staying with us in the house."

"In that case, it will only give us additional pleasure if he will consent to accompany Captain Hamlyn," added Lady Vernon. "But I fear I must now ask leave to ring for my carriage," said she, with sudden recollection; "my coachman made it an earnest request, in behalf of his horses, that he might not have to put up in your warm stable for so short a time, and I do not like to keep him out, poor old man, in this bitter cold."

"There is always so much more fuss about horses taking cold than human beings!" observed Miss Vernon, aside to Lydia (with whom she had been exchanging a few insignificant sentences, in hopes to avoid overhearing the nervous mention of Lord Dartford's name); while the simple-hearted girl, in her plain morning-dress, sat contemplating with admiration the number of ways and means by which fur could be rendered ornamental to the human form divine, as exemplified in the fanciful winter-dress of the London belle.

"You will, I hope, have the goodness to express all this to Captain Hamlyn and his friend," added Lady Vernon, a guilty conscience rendering the name of the marquis unpronounceable. "We dine at seven—a *liberal* seven. But it will be perhaps better if I write the hour on the two cards I was about to leave in the hall, on the part of Lord Vernon."

"I can only promise to *deliver* them," observed Mrs. Hamlyn, while her guest, who had risen to take leave, hastily inscribed in pencil on the visiting-cards the date of the invitation. "The gentlemen must, of course, answer for themselves."

"Since you have kindly consented to part with them, I consider the engagement accepted," said Lady Vernon, a tall, square-shouldered, law-laying-down woman, to whom, when she chose to carry a point, it seemed difficult to persist in opposition. "One really has scruples about sending men and horses across the country with superfluous notes at such a season! Unless, therefore, I hear to the contrary, we shall expect the honour of seeing Captain Hamlyn and his friend to-morrow, to dine and sleep at the Hyde."

With a shake of the hand fully qualified to frostbite the fingers of Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter, the Vernons now took leave.

"What extremely disagreeable people! And what *could* bring them out to call upon us in such weather!" exclaimed Lydia, the moment the carriage drove from the door, this being Miss Hamlyn's first interview with the family.

"It is not always easy to dive into the motives of so worldly a woman as Lady Vernon!" was her mother's reply. "That she *had* some unavowed motive, I fear I must conclude, for she is not a person who acts upon ordinary impulses of good nature. Lord Vernon may wish to conciliate your father concerning some election difficulty, or there is some private bill, perhaps, he wants to carry through the House. I know they are talking of enclosing Alderham Gorse."

"In that case, surely papa would have been included in the invitation. It seems almost rude that Lady Vernon should pointedly omit him, yet invite others out of his house!"

"Had your father been invited, we must all have been included in the party, and with the present family at the Hyde we are only on terms of rare and formal dinner-parties. We have never been offered beds. With Walter they may relax from these formalities. They meet *him* everywhere in town—he was at Eton with young Vernon. They will probably establish a footing of intimacy with your brother."

"I only trust Walter will have the spirit to refuse! Become intimate with people who have kept systematically aloof from his parents!"

"When you have seen more of the world, Lydia, you will find that those who devote themselves exclusively to high society (as Walter seems inclined to do), do not analyze too curiously the motives of their associates. Walter must take the Vernons' civilities as he finds them, or he will not find them at all."

"But why not learn to dispense with them? Surely there is nothing *very* charming in the family?"

"Miss Vernon and her brother are the only young people in the neighbourhood. When Mr. Vernon marries, his father will perhaps establish him at the Hyde. It is certainly desirable that your brother, as the future owner of Dean, should be on amicable terms with so near a neighbour."

"From something Lord Dartford said yesterday, I should think Mr. Vernon never *would* marry!" observed Lydia. "He fancies, it seems, that every young lady he sees has designs upon him, and is constantly refusing invitations, and running away from country-houses, on pretence that some family or other is trying to entrap him into a match!"

"Did Lord Dartford tell you all this?" inquired Mrs. Hamlyn, with a heightened colour, vexed at the idea that a tone of such familiar pleasantry should have established itself, without her knowledge, between the young marquis and her daughter.

"No, mamma! He told *me* nothing. While he was here, nothing passed between us you did not hear. But yesterday, the billiard-room door being open while I sat reading in the library, I heard Lord Dartford mention to my brother that he had met Mr. Vernon at Ovington (when he rode over to inquire for letters), and had almost persuaded him to take Dean Park on his way home to the Hyde."

"I am very glad he did *not!*" ejaculated Mrs. Hamlyn.

"Walter, however, seemed vexed that Mr. Vernon had not accepted the proposal, and spoke of inviting him to dine and sleep here the first time the hounds met in the neighbourhood. 'He won't *come!*' observed Lord Dartford, continuing his game. 'Why not?' rejoined my brother. 'Because Alberic never shows his nose in a country-house where there is an unmarried daughter.' Walter laughed at the idea of a child like myself being any obstacle to the movements of Mr. Vernon. 'And why not?' persisted Lord Dartford. 'As there is nothing to prevent your sister becoming his wife, except that Miss Hamlyn appears to have too good taste to throw herself away on a prig, I am pretty sure he would order post-horses and fly the country on the strength of your invitation!' Both Lord Dartford and Walter then began to quiz Mr. Vernon as a coxcomb. So that, in spite of Lady Vernon's anxiety to promote her son's intimacy with Walter, and spare the exposure of our groom to the weather *she* was not afraid to encounter, I fear an excuse will have to be forwarded to-night across Braxham Ferry!"

Most probably; but from Colonel Hamilton, not from your brother. I am persuaded Walter will go. Even were he disinclined for the party, his father would persuade him."

At that moment Mr. Hamlyn, who had been occupied with business in his justice-room, made his appearance to inquire the purport of Lady Vernon's visit; and in the mere consciousness of having just uttered his name, the cheeks of his wife became suffused at his sudden entrance. The suspicions of the mistrustful man were instantly awakened. Certain that he was the subject of the conversation which had stopped short on his arrival, and unaccustomed at present to regard his daughter as more than a child, he could not support the idea of confidence between Lydia and her mother in which *his* name had mention.

"Lady Vernon appears to have communicated very astounding intelligence," said he, examining the countenances of both with a degree of severity that increased their confusion.

"She surprised me, certainly," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, trying to rally her spirits, "by coming out in such weather merely to invite Colonel Hamilton and Walter to dine to-morrow at the Hyde!"

Colonel Hamilton? Why, they are not even acquainted," retorted her husband.

"She left Lord Vernon's card for him in proper form, and a written invitation for both."

"Very unaccountable!" cried Mr. Hamlyn, shrugging his shoulders, stung with his usual jealousy at the idea of the nabob receiving attentions likely to extend his connexions with society. A moment's reflection, however, suggested that, since it was impossible to suppress the invitation, his best policy was to assume the credit of having suggested the civility of the Vernons towards a friend and guest of his family.

"I have to ask a favour of you, my dear colonel," cried he, addressing the old gentleman, who at that moment made his appearance with Walter, after whom he had been hobbling in his morning's duck shooting. Lord Vernon is anxious you should waive ceremony as a country neighbour, and accompany my son to-morrow, in a friendly way, to dine and sleep at the Hyde. His lordship is an invalid, or would have made the invitation in person. Lady Vernon, however, has been here as his delegate, entreating Mrs. Hamlyn's interference to obtain your assent."

Poor Lydia, amazed at this fluent exposition, gazed in utter consternation, first at her father, and then upon the old gentleman it purported to deceive.

"It was my Lady Vernon's carriage, then, we saw passing the lodge as we came out of Woodsfield Hanger," cried he. "Such folly, such ostentation! outriders in a frost that might split a flint!"

"She came only to leave these two cards of invitation for yourself and my son," resumed Mr. Hamlyn, in an extenuating tone.

Walter, who had been disencumbering himself of his shooting paraphernalia in the hall, now entered, his handsome face radiant with exercise, to receive his share of the explanation; but the self-possessed London man was

cautious not to betray his surprise in exclamation.

"Very cool, upon my word," said he, "to fancy any one would leave a comfortable fireside, in such weather as this, to join a family dinner-party half a dozen miles off!" Satisfied that his father would not hear of his refusing an invitation from the Vernons, and that he should be compelled to follow his inclinations, he threw himself into an armchair with an air of indignation at the unexpected presumption of the Hyde.

With all the candour of girlhood, Lydia exchanged a triumphant glance with her mother, exultingly implying, "You were wrong. My brother has too much spirit, you see, dear mother, to be at the beck of such people as the Vernons."

"It is certainly a somewhat unceremonious invitation," gravely observed Mr. Hamlyn. "But at your age, Walter, weather or distance seldom form an obstacle to a pleasant engagement; and Lord Vernon, having known you from a boy, feels, of course, entitled to treat you with greater freedom."

"But he has not known Colonel Hamilton, sir, from a boy," remonstrated Walter; "and I *must* say—"

"Aware of the long-standing friendship between Hamilton and myself," interrupted the banker, "he builds perhaps upon the old adage, 'the friends of my friends are my own.' At all events, it is clear that the liberty he has taken arises from the commendable desire of establishing a footing of good neighbourship between Burlington Manor and the Hyde."

"'Tisn't the want of ceremony would prevent my going," observed Colonel Hamilton, heartily; "on the contrary, the only thing that pleases me in the invitation is the free-and-easy style on't, which is better than I expected from the great don at the Hyde. I'm beginning to have a handsomer notion of the family, 'pon my life. However, this weather is *not* the thing for a long drive in pumps and silk stockings."

"As there are beds offered, you would, of course, drive over to dress," pleaded Mr. Hamlyn. "My horses would take you there in forty minutes."

Lydia fixed her eyes anxiously on the face of the old man thus plausibly tempted. Though wholly unconscious of the blunder which had occurred concerning Lord Dartford's invitation, she felt that the warm, frank nature of her excellent friend would be out of place among all these artificial people. Nothing but awe of her father prevented her from darting forward with an entreaty to Colonel Hamilton that he would not be beguiled into a visit to the Hyde.

Aware of his innate sociability, she discerned, with regret, symptoms of relenting in his countenance. An invitation of *any* kind had been for many years so unattainable a pleasure with him, that the abstract idea had not yet lost its charm. He could not bear to say "no" to any man sufficiently well-disposed towards him to invite him to dinner.

"Well, Master Watty, what say ye to all this?" cried he, addressing Captain Hamlyn, who sat balancing himself with a supercilious air in his chair, divided between his inclination to snatch the olive-branch tendered by the Vernons, and his dread of appearing at the Hyde in company with such an Ostrogoth as the colonel. "If you choose to take the chance of a damp bed in Lord Vernon's old ghost-hole of a Manor-house, I'm your man! From the day of my arrival in the county, these people have always been doing one civil thing to me or another. Moreover, this is the first opportunity I've had of seeing your high-flying London ladies, which, to my notion, is worth the hazard of a catarrh."

On a hint from his father, Walter suffered himself to be victimized.

"It is unlucky enough," said he, carelessly, as he left the room to dress for dinner, "that Dartford should have been forced to hurry away this morning by the news of his mother's illness, for *his* being here would have afforded a pretext for refusing; a pretext not very satisfactory to the Vernons, however, for I remember that, in London, they were always besetting him with attentions."

Even under the heavy infliction of a great fall of snow at Christmas, the country-houses of England are unquestionably the most "comfortable" residences in the world; ineffable temples of egotism, whereof the most scientific architects and upholsterers of the day tax their invention to polish the corners so as to defy the influence of all seasons and their change. In these cozy burrows of privileged self-love, all is effected with patent precision; and miracles are wrought by the more than magic influence of the golden rod, to confer upon some isolated mansion and its park those condensated attractions and enjoyments which other countries seek in the colonization of cities, or the sparkle and animation of the courts of kings.

To the influence of fox-hunting, a pursuit which, under the molestations of railroads and other modern contingencies, is said (laud we the gods!) to be on the decline, is usually attributed the peculiarity of taste which exiles English families into the denuded country at the most unpropitious moment of the year. But the real secret of their delight in their country-seats is an instinct of exclusivism; a pride in the self-sufficient dignity of a well-ordered home, in which the social circle may be as fastidiously select as they think proper.

The noble owner of some fine castle glories in making it *almost* as agreeable to his guests as a mansion in Grosvenor Square, by bringing down daily from town the freshest London fish and London scandal, the last new books and engravings, periodicals and caricatures. Just as the Chinese embellish their little, flat, sandy gardens with artificial rocks and factitious mountains, the hard-working entertainer of a fashionable Christmas party exercises his laborious ingenuity that nothing may be wanting in his country house ("HIS country-house") which his friend might not have enjoyed better in town.

With the thermometer below freezing point, so as to neutralize the effect of any possible superiority of atmosphere, and imprison the weary guests within the over-stoved house, the captives continue to smile encouragingly upon each other's sufferings; and though inexpressibly weary of themselves and each other, persist in congratulating their host on the superior sociability of a country party in winter time, endeavouring by their laboured vivacity to disguise the growing oppression of their spirits.

"After all, we shall not find it so *dreadfully* dull here!" was Lady Vernon's consolatory apostrophe to her daughter on the morning they were expecting their new guests, casting an approving glance at the exotics with which the

zealous groom of the chambers had decorated the apartments, and the blazing fires which diffused a cheerful glow over the costly but gloomy hangings. "Your father, in one of his fits of hypochondriacism, determined that (in consequence of the expenses of Alberic's election, and those few miserable *fêtes* he authorized me to give in London for your *début* we should have no regular Christmas party here this winter, that is, no one but *my* family and his. But the Middleburys will fill the house for a week, and afford a pretext for inviting stragglers from the hunt, and persuading Dartford to prolong his visit: luckily enough, by-the-way; for Lord Vernon is always so out of spirits or so out of humour (which *he* calls a flying gout), that, had we been *quite* alone, I should scarcely have ventured the invitation."

"Have you said anything about it to papa?" inquired the fair Lucinda, arranging her worktable in elegant confusion, so as to secure being discovered in a becoming attitude.

"I told him it was indispensable to invite a few young men; for that, if Alberic were our *only* beau, he would find his cousins a horrible *corvée*."

"Papa would certainly like few things less than a match between my brother and Susan or Fanny Middlebury," replied Miss Vernon. "Family intermarriages I have always heard him attack as lopping off the main branch of a tree."

"Not more than he disapproved my having invited young Hamlyn. He has had election squabbles with the family, and dislikes the Dean Park people as upstarts and pretenders."

"But papa cannot call Lord Dartford an upstart or pretender?"

"He seems to think all the less of him for being the bosom friend of the banker's son. In order to avoid being obliged to talk to young Hamlyn, therefore, he insisted on having to dinner to-day the Barlows of Alderham, whom we never ask above once during our stay at the Hyde, as a matter of ceremony, to keep up the agent's respectability in the county."

"What people to meet Lord Dartford! And do they *come*?"

"The woman Barlow is ill, and excuses herself (I do not suppose she finds her visits here *very* agreeable.) The husband comes, I am happy to say, for he is a rational sort of person, who helps one amazingly through the dinner-talking, and will be at the trouble of answering Sir Henry Middlebury's eternal questions. One is obliged to have somebody belonging to the house qualified to discuss farming and poor-laws (which Lord Vernon will not trouble himself to do) for the country gentlemen."

"Sir Henry is certainly a dreadful bore," observed Lucinda. "And then he looks so like a churchwarden—so spruce, and wiggy, and respectable. But how are we to manage, dear mamma, about Lord Dartford? Of course he must take *you* out, and Aunt Middlebury and Fanny will sit on either side papa. But *pray* tell Alberic to place Susan Middlebury on the side opposite the fire; upon which, on pretence of being cold, I can take the vacant place next to Lord Dartford. Sir Henry, who will take me in to dinner, is much too great a wiseacre to notice what is going on."

Scarcely was the plan of the opening campaign adjusted, when the clang of the hall bell became audible.

"The Middleburys so early?" exclaimed Miss Vernon. "What *manque d'usage!*"

"They could not well manage otherwise," said Lady Vernon. "My sister wrote me word they were to sleep at Uplands, which is only thirty miles from hence; and, being obliged to start after breakfast, as there was a party in the house, she is forced to arrive here an hour too soon. With her sister, she felt privileged to take such a liberty."

The Middleburys were not people qualified to make the embarrassing hour, when newly-arriving guests are neither at home nor company, pass more pleasantly; or, rather, there was something in the hollowness and heartlessness of the Vernons which imposed constraint even on their family connexions. Sir Henry was simply a painstaking and rather solemn country-gentleman, so eager to do everything in the right way, and according to the most approved principles, that he stretched himself upon a rack of perpetual experiment. Absorbed in the study of all the new systems and patent inventions of the day, he was either absent in society, or roused himself only to bore people, till they wished him absent, by the development of his crotchety speculations.

His lady-wife was a *collet monté* of prudery and rigid education-monger, who, having lived for the last twenty years enveloped in a severe course of governesses and masters, regarded her two pretty daughters rather as the result of her excellent Trimmerism than as pleasant companions or affectionate children. Every careless word uttered by Susan and Fanny was instantly submitted by their mother to rigid analysis, and referred back to some entry in her education-leger. Any rash notice of a rainy day was connected by mamma with their early doses of Mrs. Marcet's Conversations on Atmospherical Phenomena; nor could Susan take out her leaded netting-cushion without producing a cross-examination from her mother on the first principles of mechanics, as imbibed (with their bread and milk) from the dialogues of Joyce.

Held in this precise maternal subordination, the two girls, though naturally cheerful, unaffected creatures, had become as stiff and starched as the farthingaled maids of honour of Queen Elizabeth. This was their first visit to the Hyde; and, being still guiltless of a London season, they stood in considerable awe of their cousin, Lucinda Vernon, whom they knew to be one of the fashionable beauties of the day. Seated on the edges of their chairs, glancing ever and anon at Lady Middlebury for signals to regulate their answers and deportment, the two poor girls looked almost as much in torment as if undergoing the process of thumb-screwing.

Miss Vernon was, however, in the mood to be gracious, even to her country cousins. Fluttered into high spirits by Lord Dartford's unexpected arrival in Warwickshire, she entertained little doubt of bagging her bird while thus sporting on her own manor, and upheld by her own keepers. A high-bred girl is never seen to greater advantage than when assisting to do the honours of her father's country house; and the good-humoured, open character of Dartford rendering it indispensable to eschew all imputation of coldness or hauteur, she welcomed Susan and Fanny as cordially as though she were about to stand for their county, inquired cousinishly after their little brothers and sisters, hoped they had

brought their music with them, and tried to beguile the time till the dressing-bell by exhibiting the facetiæ of Messrs. Jabot, Vieuxbois, Crépin, De la Linottière, and the divers other albums of platitudes invented to supply topics of conversation for a tongue-tied country house.

The two simple-hearted girls were enchanted. Already the numbness engendered by a long drive in a severe frost, and the repeated exhortations of Lady Middlebury, previous to their arrival, that they should sit straight, hold up their heads, and attend to the use of the subjunctive mood, was beginning to give way, and the long-dreaded visit to Aunt and Uncle Vernon, which was to be the crowning probation of their accomplishments, to lose a portion of its terrors. The Hyde, though mentioned in history, and engraved in picture-books, was no such *very* alarming place after all; and, provided their cousin Alberic, the travelled man, did not examine them *very* severely in their Italian and German, or Lord and Lady Vernon stand behind them during their execution of their grand duet in C minor, they trusted they might get through their week without *much* agony of body or spirit.

Just, however, as they were becoming acclimatized to the snug morning-room, and beginning to wonder whether the chaise-seats were unpacked, and the maid waiting in their dressing-room, *in* stalked Lord Vernon, looking a thousand domestic tragedies, and with the countenance of Count Ugolino on the eve of devouring his children.

In vain did the Middleburys rise from their seats to be welcomed and noticed. With every previous disposition to bear with fortitude the visitation of his wife's family, his lordship could scarcely command his feelings of irritation sufficiently to be civil.

"Will you be so very obliging as to peruse *this*, and explain its meaning," said he, addressing Lady Vernon in a tone of wounded dignity, startling even to his unimpressable daughter, and placing an open note in her hand; whereupon the lady of the house, amid the general silence of the room, cast her eyes over a few lines, indited on thick wire-wove, in a clerkly hand, to the following tremendous purport:

"Dean Park, Thursday morning.

"Colonel Hamilton and Captain Hamlyn will have the honour of dining with Lord and Lady Vernon this day, at half past seven; and of accepting her ladyship's polite offer of beds at the Hyde."

Nothing very obscure or involved in the phrasing of the note! Yet, succinct and straightforward as it was, Lady Vernon chose to read it over a second time ere she formed any very decided conclusions about the matter; and, on once more attaining the full stop following the fatal words "the Hyde," almost wished it could have been prolonged into the prolixity of one of Sir Charles Grandison's epistles, so embarrassing did she find her situation with regard to her justly irritated spouse.

The preceding night, she had duly announced to Lord Vernon that the Marquis of Dartford was coming to join the Middlebury party at the Hyde; hinting that, with such a snow on the ground, and such a capital billiard-table in the house, it would be their own fault if he quitted them otherwise than as the declared lover of their daughter, which exposition must be fresh in the remembrance of the indignant Lord Vernon. Nor was the impression less vivid in her own, that, a few days before their journey into Warwickshire, his lordship had observed to *her*, "We have got a new neighbour at the Hyde—a purse-proud nabob—a vulgar friend of Hamlyn the banker. I find from Barlow that he has been intruding, and making himself troublesome to the keepers, having, as a tenant of the Burlingtons, been allowed the usual privileges. We must, of course, exchange cards with this person, but I shall take especial care that the acquaintance goes no farther."

And it was after this marital warning she had to account for inviting the purse-proud nabob to dine and sleep in the most familiar manner at the Hyde!

"I fear there must have been some unfortunate mistake," said she, at length summoning courage for the confession of her offences. "Alberic informed me yesterday that Lord Dartford was staying at Dean Park, and I thought the opportunity a good one for inviting him here. I was mistaken—my son was mistaken—we were all mistaken. My card of invitation appears to have reached the wrong person."

"Wrong indeed!—the horrible Bengal tiger of Burlington Manor! However, since it *was* a mistake, a mistake it shall remain. I will instantly write and explain for *whom* the invitation was really intended. No occasion for us to be entangled in so unsatisfactory an acquaintance."

"Certainly not!" burst in faint murmurs from the lips of all present, in reply to an interrogatory glance addressed by Lord Vernon in succession to the whole circle.

But Lady Vernon, though apparently assentient among the rest, no sooner saw her husband direct his steps towards the writing-table, and open the lid of the envelope case, evidently with the most epistolary intentions, than she experienced qualms of conscience.

"After all," said she, "it is no fault of Colonel Hamilton's that Mrs. Hamlyn should have fancied it was *him* I intended to designate as 'the friend staying with them at Dean.'"

"I am convinced the whole affair is an impertinent mystification, preconcerted on the part of the Hamlyns," persisted Lord Vernon. "It is only to *me* such adventures ever happen. I am certainly the most unlucky person in the world. A man actually invited to dine in my house, whom I never beheld in my life, and whom I had expressly pointed out to my family as an object of avoidance."

"Colonel Hamilton is universally respected in the neighbourhood, I find," pleaded Lady Vernon. "Even Mr. Barlow was mentioning yesterday how active and useful they found him as a magistrate."

"There is, surely, no occasion for me to have all the useful magistrates in the county quartered in my house," snarled her lord, still rustling the blotting-book.

"Any insult offered to such a man, however, would only recoil upon ourselves."

"*Who* talked of offering him an insult? I simply intend to state that the invitation he has received was intended for the Marquis of Dartford, and that he is under a mistake."

"Which amounts to a request that he will not come and dine here to-day. What is such a prohibition *but* an insult?" exclaimed Lady Vernon.

"It is your own fault. You should have been more explicit. People cannot be too explicit about dinner-invitations. Why, so vague a definition as 'the friend staying at Dean Park' might have brought down upon us something far less reputable in the way of acquaintance than this East India colonel—some of Mr. Hamlyn's city connexions, for instance."

"Certainly, it was very careless: on the whole, we may consider ourselves fortunate that it is no worse," said Lady Vernon, trusting that her husband was beginning to mollify, so *very* fastidious did he show himself in the selection of a pen.

"We met Lord Dartford changing horses at Barsthorpe this morning, the first stage from Uplands," said Sir Henry Middlebury. "The postmaster asked leave to give his lordship the first turn-out, as he had been sent for express, it seems, to Dartford Hall, the marchioness being dangerously ill. I noticed his lordship's carriage; because, to my surprise, it had neither Collinge's axles, nor grasshopper springs. I was assured that, in London, no carriages were built nowadays without Collinge's patent axles and grasshopper springs. I had a new one from Leader last spring, solely with a view to a crane neck (the Comte de Bambis, when he was staying at Middlebury Park, having been greatly surprised that, with *our* narrow turn-in, we should venture on a carriage without a crane-neck); and I was beginning to be afraid I was again in the wrong box, my new coach having neither Collinge's axles nor grasshopper springs. But when I saw that the Marquis of Dartford, who, as one of the richest, is, I conclude, one of the most fashionable young men of the day, had neither Collinge's axles nor grasshopper springs, I instantly observed to Lady Middlebury—"

"If I might venture to hazard a remark on the subject," observed Lady Vernon aside to her husband, lowering her voice and leaning over his chair, so as not to interrupt the drowsy prosification of her brother-in-law, "I should strongly advise your receiving Colonel Hamilton as though no error had occurred. Reflect what a triumph it would afford the people at Dean Park to find that we had been anxious to attract a guest like young Dartford out of *their* house. Think what a history they would make of it in their vulgar circles. But if they were able to add that we had treated with ill-breeding an old gentleman, an old soldier, guiltless of offence towards us, and no less than ourselves betrayed into the scrape, the fault would be wholly on our side in the opinion of the world."

"I should certainly be sorry," replied Lord Vernon, whose first explosion of ire having subsided, he was beginning to sink into his usual apathetic distaste for scenes and explanations, or the exertion of note-writing and sending; "I should be seriously annoyed, indeed, that any occurrence at the Hyde justified Mr. Hamlyn, the banker, in mixing up my name with the history of his hospitalities at Dean Park. Perhaps, therefore, on the whole, it will be best to pass over this offensive mistake as lightly as possible."

"A man of Colonel Hamilton's age can never be so objectionable an acquaintance as a younger person, particularly as regards Alberic and Inda," pleaded Lady Vernon, greatly relieved. "Besides, it will be easy to receive this new neighbour of ours in so formal a manner as to give him little inclination for returning to the Hyde."

"I fear you are right," rejoined his lordship, tearing up the note he had commenced, and crossing the room to throw the fragments into the fire. "All that remains for us is to submit heroically to the evil. If Colonel Hamilton be an intentional intruder, my coldness will afford him a proper rebuke, and preserve us from farther advances should the whole affair have been as accidental as you suppose."

The dressing-bell having now rung, the party dispersed, the poor Middlebury girls horror-struck anew by the grandeur of so august an uncle and aunt, and fearing they should never hold their heads high enough, preserve sufficient decorum, or execute the chromatic scale with sufficient accuracy for the satisfaction of a family so fastidious.

Such was the circle into which the warm-hearted and hospitable Colonel Hamilton was about to become an involuntary intruder.

CHAPTER VII.

The highest life is oft a dreary void,
A rack of pleasures where we must invent
A something wherewithal to be annoy'd.
Bards may sing what they will about "Content!"
"Contented," when translated, means but "cloy'd,"
And hence arise the woes of sentiment.

BYRON.

By George! these nobs know how to manufacture a pleasant berth for themselves," exclaimed Colonel Hamilton to his young companion, when, after emerging from the long, dark avenue, after a drive of three quarters of an hour over the moonlit snow, they came upon the fine *façade* of the venerable mansion, every window of which seemed radiant with reflected light. "Your father was quite right. The distance is a mere trifle. In my fur cloak, I vow I've been as snug as by my parlour fire. After all, what signifies a frostbitten nose when a pleasant, sociable party's in the wind?"

The glowing hall into which they were now ushered, and the troop of highly-disciplined servants in attendance, perfected his elation of spirit. It had been settled that, unaccustomed at present to the ways of the house, they should arrive dressed for dinner; and, as they had made their appearance with military exactness, the drawing-room contained, on the entrance of the punctual guests, only a blazing fire, a profusion of light, and the morning papers just arrived from town, which the groom of the chambers officiously placed on the table nearest the old gentleman, whose liberal housekeeping and open-handed habits secured him far higher renown in the steward's rooms of the neighbourhood than awaited many a man of loftier announcement.

"The Morning Chronicle of to-day, I vow and declare," cried Colonel Hamilton, instantly ensconcing himself in an armchair, which he drew towards the fire, to the serious detriment of the symmetrical arrangements of the room; then, taking out his spectacles to make himself perfectly comfortable, "I wonder *I* never thought of getting down the morning papers by the day-coach!" said he, addressing over his shoulder the dismayed Walter, who stood elegant and graceful on the hearth-rug, in his well-starched white cravat and well-cut black coat. "Why, 'twould have shortened by half those deused long winter evenings. Ay, ay, let these lords

alone for taking care of themselves! But, bless me! what have we got here? 'OVERLAND MAIL, FROM INDY?' Why, 'twasn't expected these three days. By George! 'BY EXTRAORDINARY EXPRESS.' And I shouldn't have known an item about the matter afore to-morrow morning but for coming here. So, so, so!"

"And, with his legs comfortably crossed, and a heavy silver candlestick taken from the table interposed between his spectacled nose and the newspaper, the colonel gave himself up, heart, soul, and body, to the ecstatic enjoyments of a *quidnunc*—enjoyments only fully understood by those who have passed their lives in a remote colony; when, lo! the drawing-room door was thrown open by the page, and in stalked Lady Vernon, majestic in point and black velvet, arrayed in costume and countenance as for the part of Lady Macbeth. Closely following came the Middlebury girls, like her pale and awe-struck maids in waiting, having been loitering in the vestibule for want of courage to enter the drawing-room uncountenanced by one of the family.

Never had the good address of Walter Hamlyn proved more available than at that moment. His gentlemanly and unembarrassed manner of accepting the formal welcome of the lady of the house placed him at once before her eyes as Captain Hamlyn of the Blues, the friend of Lord Dartford, and effaced all trace of the banker's son of Dean Park; thus affording to the poor old colonel leisure to recover his equilibrium, and perform his part, in due form, in the ceremony of presentation to Lady Vernon.

It was only the Middleburys who, while Walter was undergoing the interrogatory of the lofty lady in black velvet concerning the health of his family, had opportunity to note the embarrassed attitude of the startled guest, not knowing how to disencumber himself of the silver branch and newspaper, or the spectacles on his nose, in time to execute his obeisances, with becoming alacrity, to the lady paramount of the Hyde.

Luckily, the page, who was now holding open the door for Lady Middlebury, rustling forward, like a ship in a north easter, arrayed in a dozen breadths of well-flounced Gros de Naples, perceived the old gentleman's embarrassment, and hastened to relieve him of at least one portion of his burden; so that, by the time Walter Hamlyn, after casting an agonized glance at the colonel to ascertain his present whereabout, ventured to ask leave to present to her ladyship Colonel Hamilton, of Burlington Manor, he was quite prepared to offer his acknowledgments for the friendly and unceremonious manner in which, as a new comer into the neighbourhood, he had been invited by Lord Vernon to his house.

To impute any connivance in a scheme of imposition to this outspoken, grayheaded old soldier, was out of the question. His delinquency was consequently limited, for the present, in Lady Vernon's eyes, to the free and easy manner in which he seemed to recognise his right to be at home under her roof. Though previously resolved to meet the friend of Lord Dartford's friend with a degree of formal courtesy, rendering it equally impossible for him to complain or encroach, she had scarcely patience with the ready freedom with which the stranger had drawn her own pet *fauteuil* of ebony, incrusted with ivory, into the trying blaze of a tremendous fire, in order to read her own paper by the light of her own candelabrum.

Sir Henry Middlebury and Lord Vernon soon made their appearance. Entering the room side by side, like the two kings of Brentford, and being unluckily presented at the same time to the colonel by his lady hostess, an involuntary confusion arose in his mind as to the identity of the parties. He knew not which was Prince Volscius, which Prince Pretyman; and Sir Henry, a tall, good-looking, sententious, portly man, happening to imbody his preconception of the noble owner of the Hyde, he set down as the country baronet the stunted peer, who, in spite of his efforts to appear with a degree of dignity fitting the occasion, had contracted, from his habitual dissatisfaction at the things of this world, so sour an expression of countenance, that he looked only a little more mean and sullen than usual.

It was to the former, therefore, as the more promising interlocutor, that the colonel began instantly to unfold the excitement of his mind, under the influence of the news brought by the overland mail; and he talked, of course, with all the prejudice and exaggeration of a man of moderate judgment, who had been contemplating, through life, a single side of a single question, unmodified by the qualifying influences of society.

Overflowing with the righteous indignation enkindled by a fiery leading article commenting on the Indian news brought by the express, over which he had scarcely found time to glance, his ardent feelings relieved themselves in a philippic against the governor-general for his sanction of certain local abuses, concerning which no mortal present was more interested than if they had occurred among the natives of Nootka Sound. Amazed by this sudden explosion of politics and petulance, the party listened in silent and contemptuous wonder, as they would have done to the rantings of a provincial Sir Giles Overreach.

"His lordship ought to be instantly recalled, impeached, condemned—his lordship ought to be hanged, drawn, and quartered!" was the unmeaning denunciation of the mildest man on earth, under the contagion of newspaper virulence; and as it happened that the sole interest experienced by the Vernon family in the affairs of the East consisted in cousinship to the offending governor-general in question, a frown contracted the brows of the elder, and a smile the lips of the younger members of the astonished family, while listening to the diatribes of the colonel.

At that moment (the fair Lucinda and Barlow of Alderham having made their appearance) dinner was luckily announced; when, alas! the previous ceremonial, decreed with more than a lord-chamberlain's exactness of etiquette by Lady Vernon, in honour of Lord Dartford's expected presence, was afflictingly superseded by the exit of Lady Middlebury on the arm of her lord, and her own on that of her brother-in-law.

"Darby and Joan fashion, I protest!" was Colonel Hamilton's secret commentation on the order of the procession. "And so the folks here go in to dinner in couples, for all the world like Mr. and Mrs. Hem, Shem, and Japhet, in the children's toy of Noah's Ark! Well, among such high-flying people, hang *me* but 'tis a better feeling than I should have expected."

While musing, however, on this singularly

conjugal arrangement, he forgot to offer his arm to Miss Vernon, who, gladly accepting that of Walter Hamlyn, waited politely for her cousins to pass before her. In this dilemma, the two poor, shy Middlebury girls glanced at each other awkwardly for mutual instructions, and having suddenly agreed to edge their way onward together like decanters in a coaster, the gallant old gentleman, roused from his revery, pushed forward to the rescue, offered an arm to each, with many jocular expressions of regret that he could not cut himself in two for their sakes; and, on reaching the dining-room door, which, like those of most ancient houses, was ill adapted for the admission of three abreast, produced new confusion and delay by his boyish hilarity with the young ladies.

Walter Hamlyn, who was following close behind with the supercilious Lucinda on his arm, of whose *persiflage* he stood more in awe than became his inches and martial calling, had scarcely patience with the ill-timed, practical pleasantries of the veteran, to whom he was reluctantly officiating as bear-leader; more especially as, on reaching the brilliantly-lighted and sumptuous table, so calculated to impose decorum on its guests, the colonel's jokes were renewed in taking his seat and unfolding his napkin between the two stiff, frightened girls, whom the good old man unconsciously addressed in something of the fatherly tone he was in the habit of assuming towards his favourite Lydia at Dean Park.

The sole consolation of Walter in this predicament arose from the absence of the hyper-fastidious and super-impertinent young gentleman of the house; but, as an unexplained chair still stood vacant opposite, he indulged in justly-founded apprehensions that the pleasure of Alberic's company was an evil still impending over them. His doubts on this point were speedily resolved.

"I have not seen Alberic," observed Sir Henry Middlebury to his hostess, "since his return from the Continent."

"He will probably be here in time for the second course," observed Lady Vernon, in a tone of injured dignity. "We never wait for my son. Alberic is systematically unpunctual. Alberic is too late for everything."

"Then I *must* say *that* is a fault which, for his own sake, I should be loth to pass over in a son of mine!" exclaimed Colonel Hamilton, not understanding that, being under the ban of the empire, he had no voice in the diet. "It may seem an exaggerated assertion, but I vow to my Maker I've never known an unpunctual man come to good in public life; and, *vice-versâ*, look at the punctual ones—look at Nelson and Wellington!"

As if in answer to the cue, Alberic Vernon, at that moment sauntering in, honoured his friends and relatives, as he took the vacant chair, with a nod of recognition, and Colonel Hamilton with a blank stare of amazement, which, when the courteous old man replied by an instinctive bow, assumed the form of one of John Kemble's salutations.

"Where is Dartford? I thought we were to have Dartford?" said he, addressing his sister across Walter Hamlyn; when Lady Vernon, dreading farther inquiries and explanations, abruptly silenced her son with "No; he was suddenly called away into Shropshire by the illness of his mother."

The question and answer, neither of which happened to be overheard by Colonel Hamilton (who was just then equally amused and bewildered by the multiplicity of fish-sauces pressed upon his choice by the *maître d'hôtel*), and which, even had they reached his ear, would have conveyed nothing but regret that a youngster he so much liked as the marquis might have accompanied him to the Hyde but for his family affliction, contained a world of enlightenment for Walter Hamlyn. All that had been inexplicable in the invitation of Lady Vernon was now accounted for; and the pang inflicted upon his self-love was only exceeded by his uneasiness at finding himself an appendage to so every-way an unwelcome guest as the unsuspecting Colonel Hamilton.

Instead of redoubling his endeavours to make himself acceptable to his fair neighbour, Walter could not a moment divert his attention from the old gentleman opposite. Every syllable uttered, every gesture hazarded by the colonel, became a source of consternation. Before a sentence had half escaped his lips, Walter began to modify or explain its purport. He experienced, in short, all the trepidation endured by the proprietor of an ill-taught dog, which has accidentally made its way into a lady's drawing-room, and is tolerated by the politeness of the lady of the house every time the intruder seems about to perpetrate some new offence.

The candid nature of the old colonel secured *him*, however, from all participation in these perplexities. His innate sociability of spirit was expanding. In that well-warmed, well-lighted room, with a capital dinner before him, a glass of generous wine in his hand, and on either side a pleasing, modest-looking girl, he found himself perfectly happy; talked unreservedly, laughed cordially, and, after bantering Barlow of Alderham (who officiated as substitute for his patron in muttering the benedicite and carving the haunch of South Down) on divers petty points of county jurisdiction, ended by infringing another etiquette of the Hyde by inviting his hostess (*and* by the name of "my lady!") to take a glass of Sherry.

Of all these enormities Lord Vernon remained a mute spectator, resigning himself to his injuries as if *far* too well-accustomed to the evil entreatment of Providence to resent being sprighted by a troublesome and intrusive guest. His ever sullen face was compressed almost to sternness, however, by his firm resolve not to be betrayed into open reprehension of Colonel Hamilton's vulgar familiarity.

To Walter Hamlyn's susceptible self-love, however, the conduct of Alberic Vernon on the occasion was still more mortifying. Assuming towards the stranger an air of ironical deference, he affected to regard him with the indulgence due to the newly-caught native of some uncivilized quarter of the globe, whose peculiarities form a matter for philosophical speculation to the world of broadcloth and brocade. Walter Hamlyn almost writhed under the supercilious expression of Mr. Vernon's countenance while affecting to *draw out* the eccentricities of their semi-savage guest.

It was torture to the banker's son every time the poor colonel apostrophized his stately hostess or her sister as "my lady;" nor could he forgive his mother for having omitted to school her careless friend on this and other futile points of conventional usage, with which the seclusion of

Colonel Hamilton's early life rendered him unfamiliar.

As the Champagne and Burgundy went round, the joviality of the sociable old man increased into the most chirruping garrulity. He talked only as he had talked to the Rotherwoods—only as he had talked when commanding the admiring attention of young Dartford, little suspecting how thoroughly his anecdotes and mirthful ejaculations were out of place. Struck by the beauty of Lucinda Vernon, who was seated opposite, exhibiting an elegance of dress and deportment new to his unsophisticated eye, and naturally attributing to one so young and fair the inward and spiritual grace appropriate to innocence, youth, and beauty, he was overjoyed at the good fortune of his friend Walter in having so charming a companion.

"Well, Master Watty," said he, across the table, after inviting him to join him in a glass of the Hock which was just then carried round, "do you *still* repent your frosty drive? No, no, my boy! I suspect you know too well what's what, to quarrel with *such* a dinner, enjoyed by the side of *such* a young lady!"

The higher Colonel Hamilton's spirits, the more offensive, of course, became his company to those who, even had they found his manners more consonant with their own nature—"*like table-land, high and flat*"—would have been equally ill inclined to see him seated at their board.

In the course of the evening, matters grew worse and worse. The Vernons remained studiedly cold and silent; the Middleburys, who, had Colonel Hamilton been a new settler in their own neighbourhood, would have welcomed him as a pleasant, chatty old gentleman, considered it a becoming token of respect to the displeasures of their noble relatives to treat him with distant civility. Alberic, who affected the fashionable *insouciance* of a miss-hater, afraid of compromising himself by exchanging a syllable with his cousins, devoted himself to the assiduous study of the new annuals (in which his own honourableship figured as the contributor of some amusingly muzzy "Musings in the Coliseum"); while Captain Hamlyn and Lucinda, having their London friends to canvass and cry down, talked in whispers, and exclusively to each other. Thus thrown out of the circle, the colonel, with a happy knack accommodating himself to whatever circumstances he was placed in, and to extract "sermons from stones and good from everything," took refuge in a grave discussion between Sir Henry Middlebury and Mr. Barlow on the Briarean question of pauper legislation, which, in the true country-gentleman spirit of worrying an argument as dogs worry a bone, they were fighting over inch by inch, and act of Parliament by act of Parliament.

The Benthamisms of Hamilton, fresh with the raw philosophy of a new and not very enlightened settler in England, were expressed with a degree of warmth, almost of indignation, absolutely startling to his sober hearers. Never before had Mr. Barlow heard the well-bred insipidity of that state apartment insulted by the emission of sentiments and principles so nearly approaching to Radicalism. With all due respect for the somewhat short-sighted benevolence of the old Indian, he considered his manifesto out of place, and declared his projects to be wholly inapplicable to the state of the county.

"I tell ye what!" cried Colonel Hamilton, suddenly appealing to Lord Vernon—the *real* Lord Vernon—whose identity he had discovered through the "my lording" of the servants, and who now sat exchanging short, cold sentences, as round and smooth as marbles, with Lady Middlebury, as though the political economy tearing to rags within their hearing were frivolous, vexatious, and beneath his notice—"it may sound very wise and statesmanlike to say that such and such principles are inapplicable to a particular county or particular crisis; but, by George! human natur' is human natur' all over the world—ay, my lord, and from King Pharaoh's time till our own! One's fellow-creatures are one's fellow-creatures—one's brethren—whether they live in Lancashire or Cornwall; and, to *my* thinking, such measures as were shown up t'other day at the Union at Braxham, and the county member who defended the county magistrates when the question was mooted in Parliament, will have something to answer for afore God!"

A dead silence followed this awful denunciation, from which Sir Henry Middlebury justly concluded that Barlow of Alderham was one of the magistrates in question, Alberic Vernon the offending county member; and being by no means anxious to figure as second in a duel to any of the parties, he accordingly hastened to hint, with precipitate incoherence, that "by the time Colonel Hamilton had been a few years longer in England, he might probably alter his views considerably on many points connected with the giant-striding claims of the poor."

"I hope not—I humbly hope not!" was Colonel Hamilton's eager rejoinder. But Sir Henry heard him not. He was now exemplifying in a double sense his love of harmony by inquiring of Miss Vernon whether she and his daughters would not "favour them with a little music;" the country baronet avowing himself so great a rustic as to treat of "a little music" as "a great favour!"

Unaware that a request of this kind, in mixed society, implies a desire to put a stop to rational conversation, Colonel Hamilton was not to be so silenced. Resuming his appeal to Lord Vernon, after toddling across the room to throw himself beside his lordship on the sofa, "I've often thought, since I came into this neighbourhood," said he, in a more confidential tone, "that if you and I, my lord, and a few more of the influential landed proprietors, were to—"

"I was not aware, sir," gravely interrupted Lord Vernon, drawing away the knee on which his strange neighbour had inflicted a familiar tap, in the exuberance of his philanthropic zeal, "that you *were* a landed proprietor of the county of Warwick."

"Pho, pho, pho! *you* know what I mean! I've got to live, and die, and spend fifteen thousand a year among ye; and if *that* isn't an equivalent to landed proprietorship, I don't know what is! I've thought many a time, my lord, as I was saying just now, that if we were all to lay our heads together, some plan might certainly be hit upon for—"

"You must do me the favour to excuse me, sir!" said Lord Vernon, coldly, rising from his seat. "I am so unfortunate as to hear these questions too often debated in my place in Parliament, and among the responsible representatives of the throne, to have much appetite for bringing them on the tapis of my own drawing-

room. Points of which the collective wisdom of the realm is perpetually engaged in the consideration, are scarcely likely, I fear, to derive much elucidation from *our* puny attempts at development. If you are fond of parochial legislation, I must beg to refer you for *my* share of the argument, as I universally do your friend Mr. Hamlyn, to the abler hands of my worthy agent, Mr. Barlow of Alderham. Mr. Barlow, sir, will, I am sure, be happy to meet you in any discussion you may wish to promote. Lady Vernon! we are waiting your commands for whist. Alberic! may I ask the favour of you to ring for cards?"

Whist levels all distinctions, and silences all argumentation. Under its influence, the dull, constrained evening at length concluded; and but that, on stepping out of the carriage, Colonel Hamilton had given orders that his own might be sent for him at eleven the following day, gladly would he have returned to sleep at Dean Park. Though still unsuspicious that he was an uninvited guest, he could not stand the repellant reserve of the Vernons. It was the first specimen of fashionable superciliousness he had ever met with, and the hollowness of such a reception wounded him like a poisoned *krees*.

"I could almost fancy the old don intended to be uncivil to-night!" mused the colonel, in silence, while his faithful Johnston was assisting him to undress. Yet *how* could that be? *Why* invite me to his house? *Why* make me free of his park on my first arrival? *Why* send his wife to leave a card upon me, if he intended to be uppish? No, no, 'tis the way of these fine folks! They're *born* so—they're nat'rally ungracious. By George! Mrs. Hamlyn was right. These Vernons are as little suited to *me* as *I* to *them*."

In spite of all his distaste, however, for the hauteur of the house, Colonel Hamilton was not blind to its merits. He was favourably impressed by the peculiar air of distinction of the ladies of the family, and the admirable organization of the household. It had not before occurred to him as possible that anything so perfect in its details as that dinner could be produced, served, and enjoyed with such mechanical nonchalance. The step or voice of a menial was unheard in the establishment; the servants appeared to be no more than ingenious machines; yet even his unspoken wishes had been divined and accomplished. He would have been sorry to mortify Johnston by avowing how thoroughly he recognised the merit of those well-powdered magicians.

"'Tis vexatious enough these folks should turn out so deused disagreeable!" was his concluding reflection, as he closed his eyes for the night. "It would have afforded a pleasant change for us all, to be on friendly terms with the family at the Hyde."

The morrow's sun rose glitteringly over fresh-fallen snow, as bright and cheerful as a day in June; and it was, consequently, difficult for a man of good dispositions, like Colonel Hamilton, to rise from a good bed to a good breakfast after a good night's rest, in an ill humour with himself or his neighbours. Colonel Hamilton was not in the habit of living on bad terms with Providence. While viewing the varied afflictions of the human kind, *he* had not courage to sulk, like Lord Vernon, with his prosperous fortunes, and accordingly proceeded, with a heart over-brimming with milk and honey, to the breakfast-room, where the uncongenial crew were gradually reassembling.

"This is all mons'ous pleasant!" said he, after going through the customary morning salutations, and slapping Walter Hamlyn on the back, while inquiring whether no pretty face had embellished the tenour of his dreams. "One could almost fancy one's self in summer, or in Indy," he continued, pointing with his breakfast-fork to a beautiful conservatory opening from the room, and bright with Persian lilachs, camellias, and hyacinths of every dye.

"The march of science has unquestionably enabled us to defy the influence of the seasons," replied the sententious Sir Henry Middlebury, perceiving that no one was at the trouble of answering an observation addressed to all. "The Epicureans of the ancient world would in all probability be somewhat startled, could they arise from their tombs and survey the luxurious improvement of our social habits. As regards, however, the introduction of conservatories among the adjuncts of domestic architecture, I am inclined to believe the gaseous emanations of the majority of the floral tribes decidedly inimical to the salubrity of the atmosphere."

Colonel Hamilton, who seldom bothered his brain with polysyllables, and knew no more of "gaseous emanations" than a New Zealander, pursued his own view of the question, addressing his observations, however, to the real Simon Pure, to whom he was indebted for the cup of smoking coffee before him.

"I often used to think, my lord," said he, "when I came driving and strolling about your place, while you were away at t'other castle in the North, that this must make a mighty grim, damp sort of winter residence. But I vow and protest you've not only banished the blue devils, but made it every bit as liveable a place as Burlington Manor or Dean Park. It must have cost a mint of money to modernize it as you've done, inside, without altering the cut of its countenance. But the attempt has answered—by George! it has answered. I was saying last night to Mr. Thingumee, your agent, that, if the place had been on hire, I'd almost as lief have taken it as Burlington Manor. *I would*, upon my life and soul!"

Walter Hamlyn glanced instinctively at the silver coffee-pot, standing at Lord Vernon's elbow, as if half expecting to see it hurled at the head of the offender. But his lordship contented himself with replying, with a deadly smile and livid complexion, "Sir, you do me infinitely too much honour."

"Not a bit—not a bit," cried the colonel, full of good faith and feeling; "you may believe every syllable that falls from *my* lips. I'm a rough diamond, I know, but *true* as unpolished."

Though he had almost determined, on leaving his room that morning, not to exchange another syllable while they remained at the Hyde with his unpopular companion, Walter now judged it prudent to interfere, and draw off the attention of the parties.

"I have charming news for your sledging project, Colonel Hamilton," said he. "Lord Vernon's venerable head-keeper has just announced to me that the frost has set in for a fortnight—and old Tom Giles is an oracle! A sad prospect for us!" continued he, addressing young Vernon, who had just sauntered into the room, and was asking for rizzered haddock.

"No chance of a run, I fear, for some time to come!"

"By George! if I'd known of this last night," cried the colonel, "I'd have sent word to Burlington by your people, Watty, to bring round the sledge here this morning instead of the carriage."

"You have mounted a sledge, then?" inquired Alberic Vernon, almost with interest. "Vastly spirited, certainly, considering there are not half a dozen days in an English winter to render it available! Always too much frost for hunting, seldom enough for skating—'*de trop ou de trop peu, partout dans ce monde!*'"

"I mounted a sledge only because I've a pretty little friend who had set her heart upon one," rejoined Colonel Hamilton, wondering why the avowal should produce so singular a smile on the lips of Alberic Vernon.

"I trust your *pretty little friend* will prove properly grateful," said he, with a plausible face. "You seem bent, my dear sir, on enlightening the darkness of our obtuse county. No end to the curious spectacles with which you have already favoured the neighbourhood!"

"Ah! you mean my hookahbadar and the Thibet goats?" replied the colonel.

"Not exactly," was Alberic Vernon's reply; when Sir Henry Middlebury, perceiving (though by no means a miracle of discernment), from the confusion of Captain Hamlyn's countenance, that his nephew was perpetrating impertinences, with a becoming deference to Colonel Hamilton's age, calling, and income, brought up his heavy forces to the assistance of the weaker party. The baronet's minute and prolix inquiries concerning the construction of the sledge, its cost, and principles of draught, allowed time to Alberic to recover his sense of decency. On this occasion, Sir Henry's powers of prosification proved as valuable as those of a pompous Mr. Speaker in the House of Commons, who, in the midst of an uproarious debate, rises to expound some point of law, and afford breathing time to the infuriated belligerents.

Already it had glanced into Alberic Vernon's mind that, though Colonel Hamilton did not belong to White's, was not in Parliament, and neither employed a quotable tailor, nor understood a syllable of French, it was unbecoming his chivalry to insult a gray-headed man under his father's roof; and with his usual glibness of speech, and pretended interest in the subject, he accordingly began to descant upon sledges in general, torch-races in Germany, sleighing parties in America, and the brilliant traineaux of Moscow and the Bois de Boulogne.

"We had some charming sledge-races at Ratisbon last winter," said he, addressing Lady Middlebury, lest he should be suspected of civility to her daughter. "I remember, one night, that mad Hungarian, Prince Keglies, in pretending to cross the Danube at full gallop, turned over the *traineau* of one of the young princes of Saxony, and broke his arm."

"For mischief sake?" abruptly inquired Colonel Hamilton.

"No, for a wager. I made my whole journey through Styria last Christmas in a sledge, and flatter myself I drive one like a Laplander. But the horses are too heavy in this country for anything of the kind—a *great* deal too heavy."

"By George! I wish you'd try *mine!*" cried Colonel Hamilton, cordially, wholly unaware of the young gentleman's previous impertinence.

"There's almost time *now* to send over for it, if one of your lazy stable fellows could be spared."

Mr. Vernon hesitated, for the proposition really took his fancy; yet he was ashamed to accept a civility from the man they had been confederating together to keep at arm's length from the foot of their throne.

"If you choose to make the experiment this morning," continued the colonel, still and ever intent upon promoting the pleasures of other people, "you must even compromise with driving over to Dean to give Miss Hamlyn a turn; for I promised her she should have the first day's enjoyment of the Royal Lydia, which was built solely to please her, poor dear, and I wouldn't have her disappointed for a Jew's eye. However, I suppose a pretty girl's company will be no obstacle to the pleasure of the drive?"

The whole party looked aghast, Alberic at so audacious an attack upon his hand and heart, Lady Middlebury and her daughters at the immorality of such a project as a *tête-à-tête* between a young gentleman and young lady!

"My sister will easily bear the privation for a single day," cried Walter Hamlyn, in utter confusion. "Mr. Vernon has far too many agreeable companions at his disposal, my dear colonel, to render it necessary to seek one so far from home."

"But I won't hear of Lydia's being put off!" cried the colonel, stoutly. "I settled it t'other day with the young marquis that *he* was to be the first to drive her, and a sad vexation 'twas to him, poor fellow, to be forced to go off at a moment's warning, before the sledge was off the stocks. The very last thing he said to me, as he stepped into his char'ot, was a wish the snow might last long enough to enable me to drive it over to Dartford Hall. 'But even then, my dear lord,' said I, nudging his elbow, 'you won't have Miss Lydia along with it;' on which (between friends) he turned as red as scarlet, for he didn't suspect, poor lad, that any one had been noticing how plaguy sweet he was upon the young lady all the time he was staying at Dean Park. But he's a fine fellow, any way, Lord Dartford—a fine, hearty, manly, unaffected fellow; and, by George, I wish there were more like him in the world!"

This rambling speech, which seemed almost intended to convey reproach to the two young men present, was followed by a profound silence. Lady Vernon and her daughter seemed petrified. Regarding the Marquis of Dartford as almost a portion of their goods and chattels, they considered the mere junction of his name with that of the banker's daughter as positive profanation. Still, the man on so familiar a footing with the marquis was not altogether to be coughed down.

Already Sir Henry Middlebury was coming to their aid, in his usual laudable spirit of prosy investigation, begging to know in what particular consisted the superiority of Lord Dartford, whether he had taken his seat in Parliament, and were likely to distinguish himself in the House?

Before the question had been jealously answered by Alberic, and scoutingly by Captain Hamlyn, as inconsistent with the well-known habits of their friend, the breakfast party broke up, the carriage being announced for the departure of the visiters for Dean Park.

By a strange but not unnatural revulsion of feeling, no sooner did Lord Vernon behold Col-

onel Hamilton in the act of taking leave, previous to quitting his house forever, than the instincts of English nature were roused for a moment in his stubborn heart, suggesting a regret that he had been tempted into ungraciousness towards any guest under his roof. Conscious that the old soldier was guiltless of intentional intrusion on his hospitality, Lord Vernon felt that, so long as the stranger remained within his gates, he was entitled to courtesy and protection. As regarded the question of their *future* acquaintanceship, according to the policy of the Thane of Fife,

There might have come a time for *that* hereafter!

These scruples of conscience were only increased by the openness of heart and hand with which Colonel Hamilton, unsuspicious as guiltless of offence, expressed at parting his cordial hopes to Lady Vernon and her daughter that they would shortly visit him at Burlington Manor, bringing with them the Middlebury family, Sir Henry having expressed his usual painstaking curiosity concerning the complexion of raw betel-nuts, and the fleece and feeding of the Thibet goats.

At that moment Lord Vernon felt almost vexed at the repellant coldness with which his lady received these neighbourly demonstrations. Like Alexander the Great, he began to reckon it among the many miseries of his destiny that his orders were too punctiliously obeyed.

"Hey day! what, an't we to travel home together, then?" cried the colonel, addressing Walter, as they traversed the hall, escorted by Sir Henry and Alberic, who were projecting a walk to look after snipes in the neighbourhood of Braxham Mere, on perceiving that his own carriage and Walter's hack were in attendance.

"You mentioned, sir, that you were not returning to Dean, but to Burlington; and, as I have business at Ovington on my way home—" Captain Hamlyn was beginning.

"Ay, ay, ay! I see how 'tis, I see how 'tis!" good-humouredly interrupted the colonel. "You threw over the old man, because you'd a mind to give yourself a chance of being invited to stop another day in a house containing three pretty girls, eh! instead of keeping company with a lonesome hermit through this dull evening? At *your* age, my boy, I should ha' done *just* the same! But come, Watty, drive back with me; and if you'll stay and dine, by George! Goody Johnston shall toss you up one of those famous dry mango curries I was talking about yesterday at dinner, of which not a soul in England knows the secret but herself. I promise you that one of Mrs. Johnston's prawn-curries, washed down by a glass of my old Madeira, is a thing not to be sneezed at, even by a fine gentleman of the Blues. By George! it whets an appetite that would carry you through three courses and a half of French kickshaws."

Afraid of hazarding a glance towards Alberic Vernon's impertinent face, Walter Hamlyn politely excused himself. While the colonel was assisted into his well-appointed carriage, he mounted and rode hastily from the door, secretly blessing his stars that his visit was at an end, to which, for many years past, he had been looking forward as an almost unattainable pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

The best composition and temperature (for worldly success) is to have openness in fame and opinion, secrecy in habit, dissimulation in seasonable use, and a power to feign if there be no remedy.—Bacon.

Though the morning was one of the brightest of winter mornings, and his hack one of the best reputed in the county, Captain Hamlyn's ride homeward was far from a pleasant one. For whatever he might have been intended by nature, Walter was, by the influence of education, more worldly and artificial than is generally supposed compatible with the warm impulses of four-and-twenty. Not "Nature," but Art, was his "goddess."

Trained by his father in abject deference to the opinion of the world, the verdict of the coteries (the "world" with which *he* was chiefly acquainted) comprehended his Alpha and Omega. His likings and dislikings had long been regulated by fashionable favour, and a suspicion was just arising in his mind that a sentiment stronger still was about to originate under a similar influence.

From the moment of his introduction to Lucinda Vernon, at a royal ball, where *he* had been accounted the handsomest man, and *she* the best *valseuse* in the room, he had regarded her with strong admiration—admiration not a little enhanced by the consecration of the name of Vernon to his early reverence by the worship of Dean Park. In the days of the old Lord Vernon, the inhabitants had lived on terms of intimacy, which did not prevent their mutual visitations from being gaudy days and domestic epochs in the archives of the Hamlyn tribe.

To such a slave of appearances as Walter, the grace and elegance of Miss Vernon were, in fact, a sufficient merit; and now that he had beheld her deriving new charms from the dignities of her father's house, yet accepting his attentions far more propitiously than she had ever done in town, his prepossession in her favour was complete. Young, pretty, animated, there was something in Lucinda's smile, when she *did* choose to smile, peculiarly ingratiating; and as she *had* chosen to dispense her smiles to the intimate friend of the fortunate man whose marchioness she was bent on becoming, the deluded guest had every reason to suppose himself an object of interest in her fastidious eye.

In London, Walter was a general favourite. Hamlyn of the Blues had conquests to boast of far more gratifying to dandy vanity than the preference of Lord Vernon's daughter; and it was, therefore, no exorbitant stretch of self-love to infer that, had other contingencies prospered the intention, his homage might not have proved unacceptable to the daughter of his noble neighbour.

Lucinda was precisely the worldly wife for so worldly a husband—for a man who took as much delight in appearances as others in reality. Lucinda sympathized in all his pretentious finery. Lucinda, like himself, had not an aim beyond the narrow horizon of fashionable life. With such a bride, he felt that he should be indescribably happy; no longer the humble Hamlyn of Dean Park, but son-in-law to the Right Hon. John Lord Vernon, and appurtenant to the noble family at the Hyde; no longer fated to figure by inscription in daybooks and legers, but included in the flattering pages of Burke, Lodge, and Debrett!

But, above all, to be beloved by that thrice-

refined being, to whom the vulgar earth seemed scarcely good enough to tread—who cultivated impertinence as an accomplishment, and pride as a virtue! It was really too flattering an unction to be laid to any mortal soul; and Walter, as he proceeded to recall, smile by smile, and repartee by repartee, their delighful conversation of the preceding evening, suddenly uttered so deep a sigh as sent his warm breath into the frosty atmosphere like the burst of extra steam discharged from a tender.

For, alas! it occurred to him at the same moment, that, though any decided avowal of preference on the part of Miss Vernon might, in the early days of their London acquaintance, have mollified her father in favour of a gentlemanly young man, the heir to an unencumbered estate of six thousand a year, all was now frustrated by the degrading light in which he had made his *début* at Hyde, as the esquire to a foolish knight; henceforward to be inextricably connected, in the minds of the family, with the old Ostrogoth who had proposed to hang for incompetency their right honourable cousin, the Earl of Clanswaney, and addressed Lady Vernon as "my lady," after the fashion of her footmen.

"I was certain the intimacy of that blundering old blockhead boded us no good," murmured Walter, in the bitterness of his heart. "How shall I ever manage to make my father understand the irreparable injury he may do us by entailing such a nuisance on the family. Useless to appeal to my mother, I fear—utterly useless! The seclusion of her life renders *her* comparatively indifferent to the verdict of society; besides, the old gentleman's foolish partiality for my sisters has enlisted her as his warmest partisan. But the governor, thank Heaven, is a man of the world; and on hearing how Hamilton has been committing himself and *us*, may grow less fond of his company. No time to be lost in broaching the subject. After to-morrow, my father and mother start for Rotherwood Castle, and thence for town; where, once settled to business, it is impossible to abstract the governor's attention a moment from his consols and Exchequer-bills. But we shall be alone to-day, and after dinner, over our wine, I will not lose the opportunity of relating Hamilton's preposterous allusions to Dartford and Lydia, which, in the presence of Lady Vernon, positively made my blood run cold!"

On arriving at home, however, Walter saw that his father was in no mood for trifling expostulations. Rarely save in the intimate privacy of wedded life, *never* with his favourite son, did Richard Hamlyn give way to the irritations of temper; but by the saddened looks of his mother, Walter saw, the moment he entered the house, that something was amiss. He could almost have fancied, indeed, that her eyelids were swollen with weeping—a painful suspicion; for he loved his mother, if not as she deserved, as much as was compatible with the shallow selfishness of his heart. He would have prized her more highly had she been the offspring of nobility than as the daughter of a family of hereditary merchants, who entailed upon him the opprobrium of having his second name (for he was "Walter *Harrington* Hamlyn") engraved upon brewers' drays and warehousemen's wagons. But, as is usually the case, the parent who had never flattered his foibles was the one nearest to his heart.

"What is the matter to-day with my mother?" he inquired anxiously of Lydia, when Mrs. Hamlyn suddenly left the room in which he had found them sitting together engaged at work.

"Nothing that I am aware of," replied his sister, to whom it was no unusual occurrence to see her mother out of spirits.

"She was cheerful enough when we drove off yesterday to dinner," persisted Walter, "and now she will scarcely utter a word."

"Mamma had no opportunity to say much while you were giving us your lively account of the party at the Hyde," observed Miss Hamlyn; "but it does not strike me that she is more silent than usual. The house appears duller, of course, than when filled with company at your first arrival. You miss Lord Dartford—you miss Colonel Hamilton."

"*Miss* Colonel Hamilton?" exclaimed Walter, shrugging his shoulders, a suspicion glancing into his mind that, according to the old man's surmises, the departure of the marquis might at least be a source of regret to his sister. "No, no, I miss nobody. I miss only my mother's usual smile, which is certainly the sweetest in the world. Either I have offended her, or something is going wrong in the family."

"What *can* be going wrong?" cried Lydia. "My dear Walter, the change is in yourself, not in mamma. By-the-way, now I think of it, she *may* be a little out of spirits; for she was telling me, as you came in, that we should have to go to Rotherwood Castle without my father, who is obliged to return to London to-morrow."

"To-morrow? How provoking! On that eternal plea of business, I suppose. I wish the word city were utterly effaced from the language!"

"Might not the name of Hamlyn chance to disappear in its company?" replied Lydia, who, under the encouragement of Colonel Hamilton, had of late sometimes hazarded a retort upon her brother.

"Nonsense! Do you suppose that Mr. Hamlyn, of Dean Park—Mr. Hamlyn, the member of Barsthorpe, has no existence out of Lombard-street?" inquired Walter, taking up his usual station in the rocking-chair, as if for the composure of his irritation. "I wish to Heaven," he continued, pursuing his train of sinister reflections, "that I had made up my mind to proceed at once to Melton with Dartford, instead of deranging my plans with Warwickshire and Ormeau! I see how it will happen. Here shall I be, in case the frost sets in, weather-logged at Dean, with that insufferable old man constantly buzzing about us like a huge insect, and profiting by my father's absence to bore us eternally with his company! Yesterday, on our way to the Hyde, he had literally the coolness to invite ME to dine and sleep at Burlington, to meet—guess whom?"

"The Markhams, perhaps?"

"A thousand times worse! Tom Gratwycke: a vulgar, silly, lanky boy, with whom my tiger would scarcely associate!"

"It was easy to excuse yourself."

"Not so easy as you may fancy. A man so provokingly friendly and hospitable as this worthy colonel of yours, is as hard to throw over as the Tower of Pisa. If the weather were not so detestable, I would start for Melton when you are off to Rotherwood sooner than remain here."

"Why not return to town with my father?"

"When I have just got two months' leave?

Absurd! I had so thoroughly counted on a fortnight here, and a month at Melton with Dartford!"

"It is really most inconsiderate of Lady Dartford to fall ill during the hunting season!" cried Lydia, laughing. "But perhaps, when it becomes generally known how much you are bored here, and what an infliction you find Colonel Hamilton, Providence may send us a thaw, or better health to the marchioness."

Walter surveyed the saucy girl with some surprise; but the result of his examination was favourable to Lydia. Though sharing his father's indignation that a child of seventeen should presume to have an opinion of her own, he was startled by the discovery that, while his attention was absorbed by his London pleasures, his sister had been expanding in the schoolroom into a lovely and intelligent girl, to a degree that fully accounted for the imputed admiration of his friend the marquis.

"Meantime," said he, resuming the train of his reflections, "be assured that I shall not disgrace myself by again appearing before the Vernons in company with your friend the colonel, and so I mean to announce this very day to my father."

The torporific influence of a family dinner, enjoyed after the taciturn fashion of Dean Park, produced, however, some modification in Walter's heroic intentions. On the present occasion, Mr. Hamlyn not only abstained from the mention of proper names, but remained altogether silent so long as Ramsay and the footmen were in attendance. During dessert, he did not exceed monosyllables; and by the time the ladies withdrew, Walter's confidence in himself and in his influence over his father was somewhat shaken. Had he possessed a single sin unwhipped of justice, in the form of a play-debt or disgraceful affair of gallantry, he would have trembled at the idea of being left alone with "the governor!"

Scarcely, however, had Mrs. Hamlyn quitted the room, when the spirits of her husband appeared suddenly to revive. Drawing his chair nearer the fire, he rang for a fresh bottle of Claret, specifying to Ramsay a particular binn—the favourite Mouton which had been in requisition for the recent Rotherwood party.

"After all," thought Walter, "the discomfiture of my father and mother arose probably from one of those conjugal misunderstandings common to the best-regulated families. Most likely, they disagreed about my sister, whom her mother brings as much too forward as her father wants to keep too much in the background. My mind is relieved. I think I *may* venture to announce my visit to Melton, and throw down the gauntlet to Burlington Manor."

Nevertheless, to his own surprise, Walter, who was the only member of the family unrestrained by the habitual gravity of his father, found it for once difficult to open the conversation he meditated; not from finding him, as he expected, out of sorts, but from the vein of unusual loquacity in which Mr. Hamlyn saw fit to indulge.

No sooner did the favourite Claret arrive, than he expanded, with reckless fluency, on a thousand trivial subjects, which, in his ordinary mood, he would have scorned as unworthy mention; such as the merits of Lord Vernon's French cook, the fine proportions of Lord Dartford's figure, and the bad taste of the Etruscan library at the Hyde. Gratwyckes, Barlows, Markhams—Ovington, Braxham, Barsthorpe—all and sundry—everything and nothing—elicited in succession some flighty remark from the habitually taciturn banker. But that Walter could have numbered the glasses swallowed by his ever sober parent, he could almost have supposed him under the influence of wine.

"As you say, old Middlebury is a mouthy, pompous, empty fellow!" said he, cheerfully addressing his son. "I remember him at college—a pains-taking ass, even then—wearing his soul out, and other people's, to ascertain, chapter and verse, the cause and effect of things that wiser people are content to take for granted. Another glass of claret, Walter! This Mouton is not to be despised. But Sir Henry is a man highly respected in his county—always in the chair at public meetings, and so forth. Lady Middlebury *used* to be a devilish pretty woman—far prettier than Lady Vernon. The late Lord Vernon was often heard to say that his son had been taken in by the wrong sister. The late Lord Vernon had an aversion to the whole family. Your health, Walter! your friend Lord Dartford's health. What sort of girl has the present Miss Vernon grown up? Better looking than her eight ugly aunts, I hope—as old Gratwycke used to call them, the eight foolish virgins. I have not seen Miss Vernon since she was a child."

"She is considered one of the prettiest persons in London," replied Walter, more warmly than was his wont, so contagious is the influence of good wine and good spirits. "Miss Vernon possesses an air of distinction and high-breeding, in *my* opinion, far superior to beauty."

"She will marry well, I dare say—though I doubt whether her father will be inclined to come down with the ready," said Hamlyn. "I think I heard Lord Crawley, the other night, quizzing his nephew about the fair lady of the Hyde."

"Dartford?" exclaimed Walter Hamlyn. "*Dartford?* No, no, *that* would never do," added he, with the significant smile that overspreads the face of a handsome man when naming a rival to whom he supposes himself preferred. "Dartford is an excellent fellow; but (as you must have perceived) fond only of horses, dogs, driving, sporting, billiards—"

"In short, not a lady's man!" interupted his father, summing up.

"Whereas Miss Vernon is refinement and elegance itself; the sort of girl whom, were it your wish I should marry, and our prospects in life were equal, I should prefer above all others for a wife."

Mr. Hamlyn, fancying, perhaps, that he had not distinctly understood the words uttered by his son, drew his chair a little closer; and, as he poured out another glass of Claret, glanced interrogatively at his face.

"I said, sir, that were I at liberty to make a choice, of all the girls of my acquaintance I would marry the daughter of Lord Vernon."

Mr. Hamlyn replied by a sudden burst of laughter, that sounded hysterical. He was a person who seldom laughed. When he did, his mirth had almost the appearance of a convulsion.

"*You!*" cried he; "*you* marry the daughter of Lord Vernon? you, Walter Hamlyn, unite yourself with a penniless fine lady? you, the son of Hamlyn of Lombard-street—of Hamlyn

the banker? Think of the tone in which that stiff-necked pharisee, Lord Vernon, would pronounce those very words, '*the son of Hamlyn the banker!*"

"I am not likely to afford him the opportunity of insulting us, sir," replied Walter, coolly. "So far from deeming it possible I could be received at the Hyde as a suiter, I never expect to enter the house again, even as a guest. After the offensive conduct of your friend Colonel Hamilton," he continued, nettled by the reiterated laughter of his father, "I shall consider Lord Vernon fully justified in cutting our acquaintance. It required all my self-command and forbearance towards every friend of yours, sir, not to tell the old fellow, when we left the Hyde this morning, how great a savage I consider him."

The merriment of Mr. Hamlyn instantly ceased. A moment before, he had been raising his glass to the light, as if in admiration of the hue and clearness of his claret. He now suddenly set down the glass.

"Better cut your tongue out, Walter Hamlyn," was his stern reply, "than let it convey offence to Colonel Hamilton!"

The banker had all the air of being as abruptly sobered as he had before been suddenly excited. Yet Captain Hamlyn, on raising his eyes, in amazement, to his father's face, fancied he could discern about the mouth spasmodic twitches of suppressed passion.

"Be assured, sir," he resumed, in a pacifying tone, "that I did not hazard so much as an ungracious syllable to the old gentleman. We parted the best friends in the world. Be under no apprehensions."

"*Apprehensions! What* apprehensions? and apprehensions of *what?*" repeated Mr. Hamlyn, with kindling eyes. "Of whom do you suppose I am afraid? All I desire is, that a poor old man, who has not a relation in the world—who has survived his kith and kin—his wife and children—should derive, in his declining years, such comfort as our society is able to afford him. A mere matter of Christian charity, Walter—a mere matter of Christian charity! Hamilton is very fond of *you;* he admires you, he appreciates you. You were his son's fag, I fancy, at Eton; and your very name refreshes his heart with reminiscences of his children."

"*His* name brings back to *me* reminiscences of the blacking-brush, which Jack Hamilton used to fling every morning at my head when his shoes were not ready!" cried Walter, hoping to divert the serious view his father had for a moment seemed inclined to take of the case.

"*Robert* Hamilton was nearer your age, I fancy?" resumed Mr. Hamlyn, with an air of abstraction.

"Robert, however, I liked even less than his brother. Bob was always a peevish, sickly fellow."

"His sickliness, my dear boy (between ourselves), may prove the origin of singular good fortune to yourself," said Mr. Hamlyn.

"To *me?*" reiterated Walter, with a smile.

"I have reason to know," persisted his father, lowering his voice to a still more confidential pitch, "that the widow is coming to spend the spring at Burlington Manor."

"*What* widow?" inquired Walter Hamlyn, beginning to fear that what he had at first mistaken for tipsiness might be in truth mental aberration.

"Robert Hamilton's widow. That beautiful Ellen Somerton, whom his father (at my instigation) did so much to prevent his marrying, and who made him so good a wife."

"Well, sir!" demanded Walter, still perplexed by his father's incoherency of manner.

"*Well,* sir? Why, I say that a pretty wife and a good wife, when converted into a widow, may make a good and pretty wife again. Mrs. Robert Hamilton's health, Walter! Drink it, my boy, in a bumper! Mrs. Robert Hamilton's health! till she become Mrs. Walter Hamlyn."

"What can you possibly mean, my dear father?" exclaimed Walter, now almost hoping that his father's mind *might* be disturbed.

"Mean! why, that Hamilton is about to bequeath her every guinea of his three hundred and fifty thousand pounds, that is, if she should marry to please him."

"I trust she *may,*" was Walter's cold reply, "but it certainly will not be through *my* offering her my hand."

"Impossible to say, till you become acquainted with the lady," pleaded his father, still undiscouraged.

"I can both say and swear it," persisted Walter Hamlyn.

"The eloquence of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds may induce you to forswear yourself."

"Not where there exists a counterbalance of vulgarity and pretension," cried the young man, his feelings warm with claret and the recollection of Lucinda Vernon's bright eyes. "Nothing on earth—no, my dear father—*I swear that nothing on earth* would ever induce me to unite myself with a widow!"

"Nothing on earth! not even your father's entreaties, your father's danger, your father's misery, your father's RUIN!" demanded the elder Hamlyn, trembling in every limb, and apparently on the verge of distraction. "Take heed of what you are saying, Walter," added he, with a glance that froze the young soldier's blood within his veins. "You know not what it is to live stretched on the rack of a responsibility such as mine. Very well for *you,* your mother, your brother, who glide through life enjoying without an effort the fruit of my labours, the fruit of my joyless days, my sleepless nights, my perilled salvation; all very well for *you,* I say, to disparage my labours, and recede from *this* sacrifice, or refuse the *other* exertion, while your father is wearing himself down to the grave by his endeavours to preserve the honour of the family."

Pausing for a moment in his impetuous volubility, Mr. Hamlyn suddenly filled his glass with wine, and swallowed it almost at a mouthful.

"But you may tax a man's faculties too far," cried he, with renewed fervour; "and beware, Walter, beware of driving me to utter distraction. I have this day cursed your brother—cursed him with a bitter and cleaving curse. I have this day raised my hand against my wife, because she ventured to defend *his* disobedience. Do not tempt me into farther outrages, do not bring me to farther shame. Walter, you are my eldest-born—you are my heir. I have ever loved *you* better than the rest. You bear my father's name—you will one day be my father's representative. For *you* I have toiled, for *you* I have suffered, for *you* I have *sinned.* Though

the others are conspiring to bring down my hairs with sorrow to the grave, my son, my son, let me not have to reckon *you* among my enemies."

Convulsive sobs burst from the bosom of Richard Hamlyn as he concluded this frantic apostrophe; and Walter, who no longer entertained a doubt of the mental infirmity of his companion, knew not whether to soothe or chide the morbid emotions of the sufferer. But, though apprehensive of augmenting the evil by any expressions of sympathy, the impulse of nature was not to be resisted; and, taking the hand of his father, he held it for some minutes in silence between his own, till warm tears gushed from the eyes of the banker.

Thus relieved, he seemed by degrees to recover some portion of tranquillity.

"Forgive me for having agitated you, my dear boy," faltered he, at length, though, in fact, it was himself alone who had given evidence of agitation. "I have this day, Walter, gone through much to disturb my mind—much to depress my courage. Your brother has grievously disappointed me. But we will talk of it another time—another time, when I am more composed. Not a word on the subject to your mother. It is unfair and bootless to entangle women in one's perplexities. They can afford no support—no counsel—and only increase the mischief by their chicken-heartedness."

"My dear father, I entreat, I *implore* you to explain yourself," cried Walter, becoming more and more alarmed, in proportion as his father appeared more rational. "Is there anything in which I can afford you the least comfort, the least assistance?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Hamlyn. "Did you not tell me, just now, that my utmost entreaties and three hundred and fifty thousand pounds would not determine you to marry a widow? such is the extent of your filial piety. But, as I said before, we will discuss the matter thoroughly another time."

"No! *now, now!* What is there to prevent it?" cried Walter Hamlyn.

"The irritation of my feelings. I *cannot* talk of it with patience—I *cannot* talk of it with reason. Your brother—your cold-blooded, selfish brother, presumes to—but no matter, no matter. When the stroke of retribution comes, it will fall on all—root and branch, sapling and tree. Lord Vernon may triumph then to his heart's content over Hamlyn, the banker." Then, suddenly ringing the bell, as if to put a decisive stop to his own rash disclosures, "let us go in to coffee, Walter, my boy," said he, "let us go in to coffee. They are expecting us—they are waiting for us. But, remember, not a syllable of all this to your mother."

This prohibition was, perhaps, as trying to Captain Hamlyn's feelings as any part of the painful scene by which it was preceded. For the first time in his life, Walter was undergoing severe mental uneasiness; because witnessing for the first time inconsistency and incoherency on the part of one whom he had hitherto regarded as utterly passionless, utterly immovable, ruthless as destiny, but steady as time. And to behold the man of stone thus passion-stricken, the man of business thus lost to all considerations of prudence, filled him with alarm.

Scarcely, however, had be been five minutes in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Hamlyn and Lydia were pursuing their customary evening avocations, when his father, undisturbed in voice or mien, made his appearance, and joined cheerfully in conversation; exhibiting no trace of his flighty excitement after dinner, or his subsequent depression.

The cold, calm, leaden-eyed banker was himself again; and as Walter contemplated this miraculous transition, he trembled to consider how much of his father's habitual serenity might be a matter of hypocrisy—how much of his decorum an effort of self-control. It was, perhaps, only within the last half hour he had witnessed indications of the real character of Hamlyn, the banker.

CHAPTER IX.

To be loved by men, a man must appear to love them; and, for preserving the appearance, I cannot think of any means so sure as the reality.—Selden.

Walter Hamlyn retired to rest that night with the fixed determination of entreating a full explanation from his father early on the morrow; but his rest having been singularly disturbed by anxieties arising from the mysterious communications of Mr. Hamlyn, intermingled with reminiscences of Miss Vernon's unusual graciousness and surmises touching the attractions of the "beautiful Ellen," his night was prolonged so far into the morning, that, when he reached the breakfast room, his father had already started for town, and the post-horses arrived to convey his mother and sister the first stage towards Rotherwood Castle.

Indignant with himself for having lost the opportunity of satisfying his misgivings, Walter resolved to address himself by letter to his father, and would probably have persisted throughout the day in his quarrel with his own ill-timed laziness, but for the consolations imparted to his feelings as a sportsman by a sudden thaw. Already the slopes of the park, half covered with snow, were assuming the sort of piebald complexion so cheering to the eye of a desponding fox-hunter; and, to crown his contentment, the Ormeau hounds were to meet the following morning at Alderham Gorse, a capital covert within three miles of Dean Park.

"Your father begged me to tell you, Walter," said Mrs. Hamlyn, embracing her son with a dejected air, as she was about to enter the carriage for her journey, "that he had half promised Colonel Hamilton you would dine with him to-day. *Do*, my dear son, if not *very* disagreeable to you! You have no reasonable excuse, for the colonel is aware that you are staying here alone."

"*Pray* do, dear Walter! he will be so very glad of your company," added Lydia, who was following her mother through the portico. "He really feels towards us as if we were his children. Make the old man happy, therefore, by dining at Burlington to-day."

Though averse at that moment to society of any kind—for Walter, though worldly and frivolous, had too honourable a spirit to have already shaken off the painful impressions produced by the rash and alarming communications of his father—he promised, ere the windows of the chariot were drawn up and a last signal of adieu exchanged with the travellers, to comply with their urgent request; and a joyful man was the old colonel that day, on finding that, instead of sitting down to his solitary dinner, a claim was made on his hospitality for the promised prawn-curry and Bombay Madeira.

But if Walter had indulged in momentary expectations of obtaining from *him* the explanation he was prohibited from seeking from his mother, he was speedily undeceived. Before he had been five minutes at Burlington Manor, he discovered that no interview had taken place between the colonel and his friend since their unlucky visit to the Hyde.

"Hamlyn tipped me a chit, late last night," said he, in the colonial slang to which the Hamlyns were now accustomed, "that he was forced to be off to town by daybreak this morning. Business, I suppose! a slice of the loan in the market, or some trifle of that sort; a Riga correspondent wanting patching, eh? or a soap manufactory blown up in bubbles, leaving Hamlyn and Co. in the suds! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Why, bless your soul and body! these great money-dealers sleep as uneasily in their beds as so many paupers in the Braxham Union. But, now I think on't, he mentioned something of an extraordinary ballot at the Indy House for the election of your uncle, Andrew Harrington."

Captain Hamlyn, aware that no terms of cordiality subsisted between his father and uncle, saw at once that this announcement was a mere pretext for his abrupt departure.

"And did my father say nothing *farther?*" said he, with assumed unconcern.

"Only that, as you and I were left solitary sparrows, we'd better perch to-day on the same branch; that maybe you'd dine with me, in compassion to my lonesomeness. And, by George! I was mons'ously kindly thought of; for, with nothing better in prospect than a *tête-à-tête* with Pincher, I was beginning to repent I'd shirked the Rother'ood party. Though I'm not fond of great lords or gaudy days (and the Hyde's been an additional sickener on that score), I'm still *less* fond of being alone."

"But you are not to be alone *long*, I understand," observed Walter, half desirous, half afraid to hazard a direct reference to the "beautiful Ellen." "My father tells me, sir, that your daughter-in-law is likely to become your inmate?"

"Ay, so she writes me word," replied the old man, in anything but a tone of exultation. "On my poor boy's death, I wrote from Indy, doubling her jointur', as I had *then* no home to offer her, or next to none; and feeling she might entertain a grudge against the family, which had shown itself, in the first instance, so loth to receive her. But I told her, poor thing, at the same time, that if ever old John Hamilton *had* an English roof over his head, there was bed and board, and a hearty welcome for her, when she'd a mind to try 'em. No occasion for her, just then, to make up her mind, for her own health was delicate with nursing *him;* and so she'd the wisdom to abide her two years' widowhood in Italy (where she'd seen him drop into the grave!), and there's luckily been time for all unpleasant feelings to subside between us afore our meeting."

"You expect her shortly, then?"

"As soon as maybe, I fancy. I suspect your good mother's friend, Lady Burlington (with whom she made acquaintance last summer, was a twelvemonth at Lucca), has been firing up her fancy with fine descriptions of the beauties of the Manor, for this visit to England is quite a sudden resolution."

"A very fortunate one for you, sir," said Walter, courteously. "Since you have made up your mind to spend the spring in the country, Mrs. Robert Hamilton's society will enable you to dispense with that of my mother and sister, on their departure for Cavendish Square for the season."

"How the deuse do you know that? How do I know it *myself?* It doesn't follow that this daughter-in-law of mine is qualified to reconcile me to the loss of Lydia's pretty prattle, and Mrs. Hamlyn's sound sense and pleasant company. I know she is handsome, for I've her miniature yonder in the bureau (a present from Bob to his poor mother); and her influence over my boy, which carried 'em through all the difficulties we threw in the way of their marriage, proves that she's clever. But I mayn't like her for all that. One seldom *does* like people by whom one's aware of having dealt unkindly! One behaves all the handsomer to 'em, by way of atonement, but there's never a cordial liking. And so, you see, if poor Ellen don't happen to take my fancy, her visit here will be more a punishment than a pleasure. However, no need to go in search of misfortunes. Time enough to take offence when offence is given."

All this was strangely different from Mr. Hamlyn's account of the colonel's disposition towards his daughter-in-law. But the old gentleman's projects might, perhaps, have undergone some modification in consequence of his recent observations on men and manners at the Hyde.

Meanwhile, Walter had no cause to repent his concession. Though disappointed in the main object of his visit, the dinner was excellent, the colonel chatty and social, and the embarrassing, taciturn meal at Dean Park the preceding day was still too fresh in his recollection not to impart a charm to the plain-spoken frankness of his host. His father's dispiriting and unnatural reserve placed strongly in relief the warm, cordial nature of the good old colonel, whose heart was open to God and man simply because it contained nothing demanding concealment.

He saw that, though the abrupt truisms of Hamilton might be out of place in such stilted society as that of the Hyde, in the every-day intercourse of life he was worth a whole wilderness of Vernons. No hidden motives—no coquetting with his power—no crooked policy in the old soldier! Though fully aware of the importance of the Hamlyns to his declining years, he made no secret of his sense of dependance on their society, but welcomed Walter to his house with the overflowing glee of one who cannot do too much to prove his consciousness of obligation.

"I've had that mealy-mouthed coxcomb, young Vernon, here this morning," said the colonel, after thanking Walter heartily, at the close of dinner, for having bored himself with such a *tête-à-tête*. "I can't abide that young fellow! There's nothing *real* about him—nothing *true*. I remember at Ghazerapore a native, who saw his black face for the first time in my looking-glass, insisting upon taking it down from the wall to search for the substantial figure behind the image. Now, when I am talking to Master Alberic, I feel as if I should like to hoist out the *real* man instead of the *pretence* afore me!"

"Did you expect him here to-day?" inquired Walter, not a little mortified that Vernon should have found his way to Burlington Manor without so much as leaving a card at Dean Park; an omission which he attributed, on second

thoughts, to Colonel Hamilton's indiscreet pleasantries concerning his sister Lydia.

"I invited 'em all, if you remember. He came with their apologies, and a pretence of examining the sledge; and had the grace to say that, for a Brummagem build, 'twas by no means a bad turn-out. So I promised him, if there comes more snow while Lydia's away, to send it over for the ladies at the Hyde."

"You told him, then, that my mother and sister were gone to Rotherwood?" said Walter, his ruffled plumes smoothed by the hope that the acknowledged absence of the family had been the origin of the slight.

"He knew it, he knew it; for the very first question he asked was, whether 'my friend, the Marquis of Dar'ford, was to be of the Roth-er'ood party?' Now that's just one of the fellow's saucy *un*realities. He knew Dar'ford was *not* to be of the party, inasmuch as he's attending his sick mother in another county. But he chose to hint a make-believe of Mrs. Hamlyn and Lydia's posting off after a young nobleman with forty thousand a year, and said as much as that he wished they might get it, only in quality terms. On which I gave him to understand there was no need of any such waste of turnpike-tickets, for that I'd never seen a young gentleman more spoony, more loth to leave a place, or more anxious to get back again, than my Lord Dar'ford to Dean Park."

"I am sorry you alluded to the subject at all," said Walter; "for the Vernons, and even others less worldly, would consider it the height of presumption on our part, sir, to conjecture the possibility of such a preference, which, to do my mother and sister justice, never a moment entered their heads."

"And why not, pray? And what right have the Vernons, or e'er a body else, to call it presumption? Lydia's as pretty and pretty-behaved a girl as any in the British dominions, let t'other be whom she may!"

"But the disproportion of rank and fortune—"

"What's fortune to a young fellow with forty thousand a year? What's rank to a marquis, who may make any Joan a lady? If Lord Dar'ford can't marry to please himself, *who* can, I should like to know?"

"He will probably please himself and his family at the same time, some day or other, by choosing a wife in his own order of society."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Do you pretend to arrange men and women in classes, on the Linnæan system, like plants and insects? Do you want to make society a kitchen-garden, all the spinach in one bed, and all the endive in t'other? Lydia *does* belong to his order of society. They are both young folks of cultivated minds and refined manners; though in both respects, betwixt ourselves, our little girl has a plaguy deal the advantage!"

"Yours is a very philosophical view of the case," replied Walter, wishing it had proceeded from the lips of Lord Vernon rather than of the colonel, "but I fear it will not stand against the battle-array of public opinion. The Rotherwoods, for instance, are worthy, unassuming people, and on friendly terms with my family; but rely upon it, Lady Rotherwood would be indignant at the idea of a marriage between her nephew and my sister."

"More shame for *her*, then, to have sat by simpering as she did, while the marquis was recommending himself to dear Lydia with all his might and main. Why, what the deuse is there *against* the match? That the girl's a banker's daughter? What then! If she was a banker's *heiress*, with fifty thousand a year to her fortune, we should have all the dukes in the land running after her, and folks would praise their prudence. My dear Watty! the day's past when noblemen thought it a fine thing to sacrifice their own and their children's happiness to the glory of having a titled name inscribed on a sham apple, in the family-tree hung up in their hall (to *my* thinking, as bitter an apple as the one that tempted Mother Eve to sin!). Life isn't long enough for such empty potter. The March of Intellect has left such rubbish behind it, among other useless baggage. You might as well pretend to believe in witchcraft or the philosopher's stone, as in the right divine of lords and ladies."

"You need not reprove *my* credulity," said Walter, with a smile. "On the contrary, it is my interest to hope you may gain proselytes to your doctrines wherever you see fit to play the apostle; but, depend on it, pride of birth was never more influential in England than at this moment. All our institutions have an aristocratic tendency. The increasing fusion or confusion of classes necessitates a sort of fanaticism in the order whose privileges are invaded, just as religious persecutions beget religious enthusiasm."

"Mighty plausible and famously well-worded," said the colonel. "'Twouldn't read amiss in a quarterly review, from which, maybe, you cribbed it, eh, Master Watty? But 'tisn't sound, 'tisn't sound, my boy! 'Tis as hollow as a bubble. You know, as well as I do, that the most stiff-necked of these aristocrats would marry his son or daughter, at any time, to mine or your father's, on a sufficient *amount* of temptation; and then, what becomes of their principles? Never was there a great heiress in England, be she whom she might, that all the lords in the kingdom didn't run after, to say nothing now and then of princes of the blood!"

"I believe you are right. But, though facts may justify your assertion, you will never persuade the world, sir, that the daughter of Mr. Hamlyn, of Lombard-street, with five thousand pounds, is a suitable wife for the Marquis of Dartford."

"If *he's* persuaded of it, let the world go and be—hanged. As to the five thousand pounds fortune, my dear boy—but of that hereafter. I tell you what, Walter, I'm sick of seeing so much of the happiness of God's creatures sacrificed to big words. 'The World!' What on earth does the wedlock of two young folks, of independent circumstances and irreproachable conduct, matter to 'the world,' which, after all, is like the wind, more talked of than seen, except by the pigs. In the first place, what *is* the world? A few court cards, with finer faces than the rest of the pack, eh? A few fine gentlemen, who've jockeyed each other out of the right of deciding who's fit company to eat his dinner, or play his rubber, in certain houses in St. James's-street? and a few fine ladies, whom the said fine gentlemen consider worth touching their hats to? That's the long and short o' the world, Watty, according to *your* vocab'lary. And what's more, there's many a first-rate professional man, ay, and many a first-rate Parliament man, whose opinion or company you wouldn't give a whiff o' your cigar for, only 'cause they don't exactly belong to what such

titmice as you and young Vernon—and your elders and betters too—think proper to call THE WORLD!"

Walter Hamlyn, who, during this harangue, had been enjoying a cigar and a glass of whisky-toddy such as the steps of Crockford's never afforded to their amateurs, secretly congratulated himself that these Hottentotisms of the worthy old gentleman had not startled the ears polite of the Hyde, instead of producing in his own a gentle titillation, forming an agreeable counteraction to the soothing fumes of his fragrant Havana.

"I dare say you are very right, sir!" said he, throwing the stump into the fire, and taking from the silver salver by his side a steaming goblet, a few concluding sips from which completed the unusual expansion of his feelings. "It is a field I have often fought over with my brother Harry, and been invariably defeated. Harry pretends that those who live out of society (such as himself, as a scholar, or *you* as a hermit) are in the position of aeronauts looking down upon the earth and beholding all things on the same level—the mountain and the mole-hill, the city and the village."

"And a plaguy good notion too! That was Harry's idea, was it! I suspect he and I should hit it off famously."

"Harry is an original, as I heard my sister telling you the other day."

"Why, I hope you don't call yourself a *copy?* Lydia was saying, if you remember, that no people on earth could differ more than her two brothers!"

"According to Harry's doctrines, the difference arises from the pressure of the atmosphere we live in, as the weight of objects differs in or out of the receiver of an airpump. So strong, however, is the influence of our second nature, that, I admit, few people would take us for brothers. Harry is quite a bookworm."

"And *you* a *silk*worm, eh? Well, I can't approve his taste in *that* particular. Reading's a famous thing when talking's not to be had. Books are good company enough where there are no men and women. At Ghazerapore, for instance, a new magazine or amusing tour was manna in the desert. But, thanks to the Bond-street booksellers, yonder table's covered with 'em, and 'twould be a long time afore I thought of cutting open the leaves, so long as I'd your pleasant company at hand, or the choice of dropping in to a rubber at Dean Park. By-the-way, I suppose we shall be having your brother at home here shortly? He'll be of age, won't he, next month?'

"Next month? February? Yes, I believe so. But coming of age is an expression seldom used in a family, unless for an eldest son. Harry will certainly be one-and-twenty on the 19th of February."

"And in another month or so, I think Lydia told me, he's to take his degree?"

"You may rely on Lydia's information on any point regarding her brother. They are nearer of an age, and nursery friends. *I* have lived less with my sisters, and Harry is decidedly the favourite."

"'Tis but fair the poor lad should be a favourite with somebody or another!" observed the colonel; "for, between you and me and the fire, Watty, you have it all your own way with your father."

"I should have thought you had now seen enough of the family, sir," replied Walter, "to be aware that no one has a grain of influence with my father! In his own quiet way, he is the most arbitrary man on the face of the earth."

"A pretty thing for *you* to say, my young spark, when you chose to be a soldier (more's the credit to you) in spite of his teeth! 'Tis *my* notion that all eldest sons are born with the bump of contradictiveness. There was *my* poor boy. He, too, chose—but no matter! However, from something your mother hinted to me t'other night (as a reason for begging me not to mention Harry's name just now afore his father), I suspect my friend Hamlyn's found cause to regret he did not pop him into the banking-house three years ago, instead of sending him Greek-mongering to college."

"Has Harry been getting into scrapes, then, at Cambridge?" eagerly inquired Walter, sitting down again, though he had just risen to depart. "Very unfair of him not to apply to *me!* Very unfair of him—very *unkind.*"

"Maybe he *might*, if they were *money*-scrapes!" replied the colonel, forgiving young Hamlyn his French essences and varnished boots in favour of his prompt brotherly affection. "But *I'm* afraid he's likely to cross his father's purposes, just as his brother did afore him. Neither of my friend the banker's sons seem to inherit much taste for the shop; one, 'cause he's a fine gentleman—t'other, 'cause he's a whimsical gentleman. The proverb doesn't always hold good, that 'As crows the old cock, so crows the cockerel.'"

"Do you mean to say, sir," demanded Walter, in great surprise, "that Harry rebels against going into the bank?"

"Something of that kind, I fancy?"

"Why, he must be out of his senses!"

"Were *you* mad, pray, when you raised the same objection?"

"I sometimes think so!" replied Walter, good-humouredly. "But, though my father compromised with the insanity of his elder son, I fear he has not a sufficient stock of patience for *two*. Consider what a loss to the family, should anything happen to my father, if none of us succeed him in the business."

"I suppose *that's* what he pleaded to *you*, eh! and has now got to plead to Rebel the Second? Mrs. Hamlyn, I can tell you, is miserable about the matter, and wanted me to use my influence in softening her husband. But, faith, I'm far more disposed to try my hand at melting the obstinacy of the delinquent. On this occasion, Hamlyn has all the reason on his side."

"To be sure he has! What a provision for Harry to reject! Such a standing as my father's! Such a position as that of an eminent London banker."

"Then why scout it yourself, Mister Jessamy?"

"Harry and I are differently situated. *His* alternative was an appointment in India."

"*Was* and *is* are two things! Harry Hamlyn, they tell me, has distinguished himself prodigiously at the University. The learned professions are open to him. Public life's open to him."

"So it will be if he fulfil my father's intentions. The great object of my brother's going to Cambridge was to qualify him for the House of Commons (for which I have not the smallest vocation), so that, one day or other, my father may resign him his seat for Barsthorpe."

"Pending which, he's to wear away the best of his days in Lombard-street, trying to prove to the money-changers that two and two make five, with a quill behind his ear, and the price of stocks always ringing *in* it. See what such a life has done for Hamlyn! Shrivelled him into a mummy! Why, at eight-and-forty, your father's an older man, at heart, than I at sixty-seven, after grilling away my constitution between the tropics. However, for all that, I don't wish to back up your brother! I only mean to say, as his mother did to *me*, that there are excuses to be made for the lad; that at *his* age, a fellow of spirit thinks twice afore chaining himself to the oar; and that, over a mind like his, one has a better chance by the influence of argument, than by throwing his dependance in his teeth and seeing who can talk loudest. But mind, Master Watty! All this is as confidential as a governor-general's despatch. So don't go and let the cat out of the bag, and get me called over the coals for blabbing."

"It is a poor compliment to my head and heart," said Walter (bitterly enough for a dandy), "that I am the last person to be made acquainted with the troubles of my family!"

"Such very fine gentlemen as you are sometimes supposed to care less what is passing in their families than elsewhere," cried the old colonel, who took as much pleasure in putting him on his mettle as is found by many in setting up the bristles of a handsome terrier. "However, if for half a second I fancied you one of the hollow hearts, Watty, my boy! I ask your pardon! I see I didn't do you justice."

"I was resenting the injustice of my mother and brother, sir, rather than yours," replied Walter, coldly.

"And can't you see that they might feel a delicacy about involving you in a question of filial rebellion? Harry could hardly complain of his fortunes to you—his expensive, pampered, elder brother—without running the risk of giving you pain."

"Better keep his scruples for the pain he is likely to give my father," cried Walter, piqued almost out of his generous feelings towards his brother. "However, since no one thinks me worth consulting, I may spare myself the trouble of giving an opinion. Good-night, Colonel Hamilton! I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, as the hounds meet at half past ten, and we have a heavy country before us."

"Not see me? No such thing!" cried the old man. "The meet's at Ald'rham Gorse, and I mean to drive over to covert. Though my sporting days are over, I don't see why I shouldn't give myself the treat of looking at a neat turn-out, when the thing's within distance. I'll call for *you* in the barouche, and your horses can meet you at Ald'rham. But I won't keep you now, my dear Walter, as you've got sportsman's hours upon your hands. So good-night, and pleasant dreams t'ye!"

It is generally admitted that a covert side is one of the most sociable gathering-places of a sporting county—the fountain-head of its feuds and reconciliations, its politics and scandal. All men "qualified to bear arms" hasten thither, as if in proof of their mettle; and even the veteran sportsmen of the neighbourhood, long retired from the active pleasures of the field, make it a point to repair to the "coffee-room" whenever a meet takes place within reasonable distance.

Few country spectacles more exciting, in short, than the rendezvous of a favourite pack; to which, on all sides, equipages of every sort are repairing in full animation, from the family-coach of the squire to the knowing dog-cart of the trainer. Natty grooms, leading their master's horses, but jealously watching the condition of the grooms and horses of other masters; the sportsmen themselves, arriving singly, doubly, or in groups, on their road-hacks—in their mouths a cigar, or a reprimand for the luckless lad who is sure to be too late or too early, or have heated their hunters in zeal to prove over-punctual; and, finally, the weather-beaten, shrewd-faced old huntsman and whipper-in—part and parcel of their well-known steeds—centaurs, whose man-moiety is encased in scarlet and black velvet—followed by, or following, the pack of eager, high-couraged hounds, who move together, vivacious and compact, as though a quarter of an acre of snow were suddenly endued with life and muscularity—all conspire to impart to the winter landscape a degree of vigour and vitality such as, amid the more vivid impulses of summer, a race-course alone avails to call into action.

All the world, animate or inanimate, is in towering spirits. Care is forgotten, business laid aside. The statesman renounces his politics, the country doctor neglects his patients, the bridegroom

> Forgets the bride
> Was made his wedded wife yestreen:

the farmer defies his wife's prohibitions, and the farmer's son the farmer's, the moment the hounds are heard or seen making their way towards the spot where from two to four hundred healthy, happy individuals are met together for the annihiliation of a monster two feet long, whose direst offence against the community consists in robbing a henroost!

It was the first time in his life Colonel Hamilton had witnessed this cheering spectacle, and his eager spirits readily took fire as he drove towards Alderham Gorse, encountering at every turn of the road some neighbour whose scarlet coat and snow-white leathers gave him the appearance of a stranger; or some stranger, whose clever turn-out rendered him an object of interest and curiosity. Having persuaded Walter to bear him company in the barouche, the young sportsman found himself every moment compelled to take his cigar from his mouth, in order to satisfy the inquisitiveness of his companion.

"Who the deuse is that crossing the turnip-field?" cried the colonel. "Why, by George! 'tis old Barlow himself, looking as fresh as a four-y'r old, and all the more consequential to-day that the meet's on his own ground. I didn't know Barlow was a sportsman: yet his hunting-coat seems to have seen service. And who have we here, that the farmers and grooms are uncapping to as though 'twas the governor-general, in a bit of pink that looks as if turned out by a milliner rather than the tailor, and a strawberry and cream complexion to match? Ugh! I thought so; I knew 't could be no other than the young jackanapes from the Hyde."

Walter Hamlyn felt almost ashamed of the impulse which prompted him, at that moment, to look out eagerly on the opposite side (at a restiff colt which was doing its best to unseat one of the Alderham farmers, who had a mind to show off his stock in the field, and unite business with pleasure), as a pretext for not bowing to Alberic Vernon, while thus familiarly accom-

panying, in his own carriage, the man so outrageously contemned at the Hyde. But there was no fear of his guileless companion misdoubting his pitiful motives. The colonel was engrossed, both heart and soul, both eye and ear, by the stirring scene before him.

"By George! what a splendid creatur'," cried he; "that bay, I mean, from which the helper has just shifted the saddle-cloth. Why, 'tis a pictur' for an artist! Worth three hundred guineas if it's worth a pound! Whose is it, I wonder?"

"This is only the third time I have been out this winter," replied Walter, "and I scarcely know a horse in the field. Lord Cossington is usually the best-mounted of the Ormeau party; but *he* would have had one of the hunt-grooms in attendance. The bay probably belongs to a stranger. There are always fellows over from Leamington, who make a grand show and prodigious noise. We are pretty sure to have some wonderful turn-outs from Leamington."

The stir and bustle were now every moment increasing, till they reached the outskirts of the gorse, whose dingy verdure looked almost as gay in the midst of winter nakedness as its golden blossoms rendered the spot at midsummer amid surrounding verdure. Many a manly, weather-beaten face was turned benignantly towards Colonel Hamilton, as they drove through a jolly group of fustian-suited but famously-mounted sportsmen, the farmers of the neighbourhood; and Walter was almost piqued to perceive that, among *them*, as well as among the country gentlemen, his companion, though so new a comer into the county, was better recognised than his father's son, the hereditary 'squire of Dean Park. There was something peculiarly cordial in their mode of touching their hats to the old soldier, with whose manly calling and liberality as a lord of the manor they experienced more sympathy than was compatible with the demure, cautious, and sedentary nature of the banker; whom, though affecting the War'ickshire squire, they could never prevail on themselves to regard otherwise than as Hamlyn of Lombard-street.

A thousand friendly greetings and uproarious "how are ye's" were exchanged between the colonel and the lesser squirearchy of Braxham and Ovington, of whose existence, after the fashion of the Hyde, the Hamlyns affected to have no cognizance, till Walter found himself so much embarrassed by their familiarity with his companion, that he was right glad to descry his groom and hunter leisurely walking towards the appointed spot.

In a moment he was out of the carriage, which the colonel, in compliance with the advice of his jocose friend, had caused to be drawn up on a rising ground, commanding a view of the covert and of the vale of Alderham, which the fox, when found, was most likely to take.

"What a thousand pities your mother and sister were forced to go to Rother'ood!" exclaimed the colonel, in the utmost glee and excitement, as Walter turned, on the carriage-step, to give him a parting nod. "Lydia would have enjoyed all this. By George! it almost tempts *me* to call out, like the man in the play, for 'a horse—a horse!' I shouldn't be surprised, afore the season's over, to find myself in the saddle, among the best of ye, galloping like the tailor to Brentford, or John Gilpin to Ware."

At that moment Walter Hamlyn sincerely wished the noisy old man, whether mounted or on foot, anywhere but where he was; for a carriage with the Vernon liveries was fast approaching; and sooner than be found in company with the obnoxious arraigner of the Earl of Clansawney, the Bayard of the Blues resolved to flee before the face of the lady of his knightly thoughts.

By the time the blooming cheeks of Susan Middlebury and her cousin were perceptible from the carriage window, screening their eyes with their hands from the trying glare of the winter sunshine as they gazed with eager curiosity upon the motley group, Walter was apparently absorbed in a highly-interesting discussion with his groom, touching the stirrup-leathers of his hunting-saddle.

"Good-morning, Colonel Hamilton—a charming day for the field! I think I may venture to point out the scene before us to your admiration, as one of the most national and characteristic in Great Britain," shouted Sir Henry Middlebury, who was enacting the part of chaperon to his daughters and niece. And while the courteous old soldier attempted to mingle with his interjectional replies to the mouthy baronet a succession of salutations to his lovely companions, Walter Hamlyn stood obstinately afar off, resolved on no account to be confounded by the fair Lucinda with his homely friend.

At that moment a general buzz and murmur announced an occurrence of some importance—some luckless sportsman unhorsed, or some presuming bumpkin chastised. Equestrians rose in their stirrups, and pedestrians on their tiptoes, while the inmates of the half dozen carriages on the ground peered out with an air of interest. "The duke! the duke!" was instantly passed like a watchword from lip to lip, as a gentlemanly, middle-aged man, mounted on a horse (whose value was equal to that of a moderate farm), rode hat in hand through the knot of sportsmen assembled at the lower extremity of the covert, accommodating the pace of his noble steed to the amble of a crop-eared, strange-looking, old shooting-pony, bestrode by the scarecrow figure of old Gratwycke of Gratwycke, who rode beside his Grace of Elvaston with the air of something between an earth-stopper and the clown's assumption of a cockney sportsman in a Christmas pantomime; for the duke entertained the highest respect for Mr. Gratwycke of Gratwycke: first, as the head of the most ancient family in the county; next, as the stanchest preserver of its foxes; and, thirdly, as the most active and conscientious seconder of the politics of the house of Ormeau. Finer gentlemen were at all times disregarded by the Elvastons, to make way for a Gratwycke of Gratwycke.

"What on earth brings old Grat and his pony out to-day?" muttered Mr. Barlow of Alderham.

"What under heaven keeps the duke maundering yonder with Gratwycke, when Bowie is putting the hounds into the covert?" exclaimed in his turn Alberic Vernon, as the great man of the moment pushed his way side by side with the queer-looking old gentleman straight towards the carriage of Colonel Hamilton, within a few yards of which stood young Vernon, admirably mounted, and, in spite of his horror of the duchess's Irish nieces, greatly in hopes of catching the eye of the duke, and obtaining an invitation to Ormeau.

But the "Frenchified prig" was precisely the sort of youth to move, at the utmost, an indulgent smile on the countenance of the noble sportsman. Passing with a slight bow of recognition the unpromising son of one of his least estimable neighbours, his grace fulfilled his preconcerted purpose of soliciting an introduction from old Gratwycke to his friend the new lessee of Burlington Manor. Though Ormeau was situated in another county, whereof it formed the leading influence, the habits and character of Colonel Hamilton were fully understood and appreciated by the Duke of Elvaston, who admired his liberal politics and active benevolence, as much as he despised the narrowness of mind of the ennobled rather than noble lord of the Hyde, who was known to have driven a Smithfield bargain with his vote and conscience as a peer of the realm.

By this spontaneous mark of respect on the part of a man so universally beloved as the Duke of Elvaston, the old colonel was inexpressibly gratified, and he sat leaning with a brightened countenance from the carriage to receive the thanks of the duke for his attention to the only covert on the Burlington estate, and a hearty invitation to him to improve their acquaintance at Ormeau the first opportunity.

"If you will come and see me," said his grace, cordially, "I will show you the height we consider the right thing for thorns in the coverts on *my* side the county. The late Sir Roger Burlington being at variance with me on political and other matters, always decided that we lived out of visiting distance; which is so far true, that a range of fourteen miles is convenient or inconvenient, according to the liking of the parties. I shall sincerely rejoice if Colonel Hamilton will permit me to account *him* among my near neighbours."

And as he courteously raised his hat while receiving the worthy colonel's equally frank reply, and then rode on towards the huntsman, leaving old Gratwycke to potter with his friend, not a man in the field but experienced a certain accession of deference towards the stranger whom the duke they so dearly valued delighted to honour.

But of all present, Walter Hamlyn was the one on whom his grace's attentions produced the strongest impression. At one moment, mortified to see civilities volunteered by the noble owner of Ormeau to a perfect stranger in the county, in which his father, an established landed proprietor, had never obtained from him more than a distant bow—he was inclined to rejoice, the next, at a mark of distinction which he was certain had equally astonished and vexed the supercilious heir-apparent of the Hyde.

"It is all the result of that malicious old Gratwycke's representations," was Walter's first reflection. "This will teach the Vernons to think twice before they insult a friend of my father's!" was his second. And while accusing the Middleburys of meanness for the pains they were already taking to enter into conversation with the colonel, he forgot to blush for the still baser inconsistency which had prompted *him* to shrink from the side of his good old friend, in the dread of exposing himself to the quizzing of more fashionable associates.

During the silence that now superseded the boisterous gossip of the groups of sportsmen, while the hounds were pushing their way into the prickly covert, Walter was musing in most unsportsmanlike guise upon the singular popularity of Colonel Hamilton.

"'Tis altogether unaccountable," murmured he. "Ordinary in appearance—unpolished (not to say vulgar) in manners—moderate in abilities, uncultivated, illiterate—neither a sportsman, nor an agriculturist, nor a politician—he comes hither, an utter stranger, and instantly makes the conquest of every family of rank or eminence in the neighbourhood! The Duke of Elvaston rarely troubles himself to be civil to any but foxhunters; Lord Rotherwood cares only for farmers; Lord Crawley for Tories; Dartford for his brother officers! Yet one and all have singled out Colonel Hamilton for a favourite! Just as my mother and Lydia are ready to fetch and carry for him, like a brace of spaniels, do four of the most marked men in England put themselves out of their way to beset him with attentions! What is the meaning of this? To *them* his fortune is nothing! It *must* be the genuine cordiality of the old man's nature which begets cordiality in return! One might almost fancy that some malignant counter-charm had arisen from my father's desire to keep him on terms of exclusive intimacy with our family, which serves to attract towards him the officious attentions of the whole world!"

CHAPTER X.

Still harping on my daughter!

SHAKSPEARE

"I MUST say, my dear Walter," observed Colonel Hamilton, when they met the following day at dinner, at the humble but cheerful board of Ovington Vicarage, "that your good father's promises concerning a winter in War'ickshire were quite on the safe side o' things! Why, in proposing to me the tenancy of his ward's seat of Burlin'ton Manor, Hamlyn expressly said it had little to offer in the way of society beyond his own fireside, which was open to me at all times; and our good friends, the present company, who he promised me would be charitable enough to put up with the intrusions of a troublesome old fellow, likely to beat the doctor at backgammon, and be less grateful than he ought for the prescriptions of the doctor's good lady. He told me frankly I might whistle for the civilities of the Hyde; while Ormeau, being in another county, might as well be in another kingdom. Well, sir! I wasn't daunted. I signed, sealed, and delivered, in spite of all he said to prove I was going to be as lonesome at Burlin'ton as Robinson Crusoe, with only himself for my man Friday."

"We have all the more to thank you, my dear sir," said Dr. Markham, cheerfully, "for your confidence in our good-will to make you happy among us."

"But just admire, doctor, how much better my friend Hamlyn has been than his word. See how he's managed matters for me! Invitations to Rother'ood Castle, to Dar'ford Hall, to Lord Vernon's, to the Duke of Elvaston's—twice as many, in short, as I care to accept. This is acting the part of a friend by one. However, I can do very well without these lords and ladies. What with Dean Park, and my friends here and at Gratwycke, I needn't spend an evening a week at home more than I please."

At this undeserved compliment, Walter Hamlyn felt the colour rise to his temples. No one knew better than the Markhams Mr. Hamlyn's utter inability to work the miracles imputed to him. The doctor was, however, sufficiently considerate towards his embarrassment to devote himself assiduously at that moment to the study of the glass, predicting rain from a trifling rise, while Captain Hamlyn, aware of the importance attached by his father to his influence over the nabob, dared not hazard more than a slight disclaimer.

"My father has every disposition, sir," said he, "to secure you all these accessions, and more, to your comfort at Burlington. But the will is not always the power."

"'Tisn't for my own share I care about the matter!" cried the colonel. "As far as I'm concerned, I vow to my Maker that Dean Park and Ovington Vicarage comprise all I ever wish to see of society. The Hyde is about as cheerful as a model-penitentiary or family vault; and though the Rother'oods are excellent folks, I've seen faster coaches in my time. But I'm mighty glad to have secured a little change for poor Ellen! After living abroad, she'll find the Manor as dull, maybe, as *I* find Lord Vernon's state-prison. But now, if she wants younger faces than mine and my friend Hamlyn's, at Rother-'ood she'll have a sight of the young marquis, and at Ormeau of the young marquis multiplied by ten. If among 'em all she find nothing to suit her, the devil's in't!"

Walter Hamlyn felt surprised, almost indignant, at the idea of this exposure of the "beautiful Ellen," who had been all but offered to himself, the presumptive heiress of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds in ready money, to the coveting of the *roué* sportsmen somewhat freely mingled with the stately circle of Ormeau. But it was not for *him* to remonstrate.

"Any news to-day from the travellers?" inquired Dr. Markham of Walter, though of opinion that Mrs. Hamlyn was more likely to have addressed her communications to her Burlington neighbour than to her dandy son.

"None," replied Walter; "but with such roads, such carriages, and such weather, the journey was not very alarming."

"There might have come ill news short of a break-down, however," replied the colonel, vexed at his listlessness. "My good friend, Mrs. Hamlyn, was but so-so in spirits when she left home."

"My mother wanted change of air and scene. She leads too sedentary a life."

"A life of duty and diligence," said the vicar. "Her candle goeth not out by night. Like the wise matron of Solomon's time, 'she maketh herself coverings of tapestry, and layeth her hand to the spindle.'"

"I hope for a letter from Rotherwood to-morrow," observed Walter, who always fancied, when people quoted Scripture in his presence, that they were talking *at* him. "I am most anxious to know about Lady Dartford, on the state of whose health depends whether Dar is likely to meet me at Melton next week."

"Next week? Why you're surely not going to start *next week?*" cried the colonel. "Sha'n't you wait till Madam Hamlyn and Lydia come back? Sha'n't you be here to make acquaintance with Ellen?"

"I think of returning to Dean Park, sir, a few weeks hence. This is the best part of the season for Melton. All my friends are there just now."

"By George! that puts me deusedly out in my plans," cried Colonel Hamilton, unreservedly. "I was going to ask a favour of you, Master Watty. I've a mons'ous mind to have a peep at one of your fine universities, and thought of giving myself a scamper over to Cambridge, and asking *you* to be my dragoman."

"Had it been in my power to accompany you, my dear sir, I should, of course, have pleaded for Oxford," replied Captain Hamlyn. "Bound to be faithful to Alma Mater, are we *not*, Dr. Markham? I, you know, am a Christ Church man."

"And little the better for it, I'm afraid, eh, Master Watty? But I want to see a thing or two at Cambridge besides King's College Chapel. I want to see Henry Hamlyn—I want to have a talk with your brother."

"In that case, sir, you are infinitely better without me," replied Walter, dreading a more distinct allusion, in presence of the Markhams, to the critical state of his family, and still smarting under the want of confidence of his brother. "It would take me a hundred miles out of my way to attempt Cambridge on my road from Ovington to Melton Mowbray."

"Ay, ay? Well, I've made a circumbendibus of a thousand miles in Indy, afore now, to serve a friend; and, to my thinking, a brother's the friend given us by GOD. However, I won't insist upon a plan that seems to derange your fox-hunting. I dare say Johnston and I can manage to settle with the postboys, and find out the road to Trinity College by following our own long noses."

"I was thinking—" said Mrs. Markham, as if about to unfold some serious project, then suddenly stopping short, under the influence of the awe which habitually prevented her from expounding her thoughts except to the vicar.

"*Well*, my dear ma'am," persisted the colonel, incapable of suspecting shyness on the part of a full-grown woman of two-and-thirty; "*what* were you thinking?"

"Oh! nothing, sir—nothing *very* particular," she resumed, glancing at Dr. Markham for encouragement; "only it is a great many years since the doctor was at Cambridge—but once since he married, when he took his doctor's degree."

"You're a Cambridge man, then, are you, doctor," interrupted the colonel, not seeing her drift, because little surmising that *his* presence could so far impose on any person as to induce concealment of any kind.

"An old Johnian," replied Dr. Markham: "and my little wife has it in her head, I see, that I should enjoy a trip to my bachelor haunts, if you would engage me, instead of Captain Hamlyn, to show you the lions."

"By George! a capital thought," cried the colonel. "My dear lady, *why* didn't you speak out? Is Markham such a bully behind the curtain that you daren't call the tongue in your head your own? But, I say, doctor, how are we to manage about the shop? Who's to make the poor folks of Ovington the wiser and better for their wisdom and goodness on Sunday next, during our frolic?"

"As I have not been a day absent from home for the last three years," replied Dr. Markham, "I have many debts of service to my clerical brethren to call in. Having done duty some thirty times for my good friend Hurst of Braxham, he will scarcely grudge me a single Sunday in return."

"*That*'s well settled then!" cried the colonel, setting down a cup of tea, which, by the care of his thrifty hostess, he fancied a thousand times better than he drank at home. "I like the thought of our excursion mons'ously, doctor. And mind, on our return, I'll tell no tales, no histories about favourite old laundresses with cherry-coloured ribands. You started the hare, my dear ma'am, and I can't promise you when or where 'twill sit. And now, what say ye to a hit at backgammon?"

"What command of countenance you must have, my love, not to laugh outright this evening, when Colonel Hamilton was thanking young Hamlyn so cordially for his father's interposition with the Duke of Elvaston!" said Mrs. Markham to her husband, an hour or two afterward, when the sound of the colonel's chariot-wheels on the gravel announced the departure of their guests.

"It was no act of imposition on Captain Hamlyn's part that the old gentleman chose to account for his grace's civilities in his own way."

"Not on *Captain* Hamlyn's. But it is clear to me that the father never lets slip an occasion of magnifying the extent of his services and power. Mr. Hamlyn fancies himself almost as much the guardian of Colonel Hamilton and his fortune as of poor little Sir Hugh Burlington."

"My dearest Kitty!"

"I am certain he has made up his mind to secure every guinea of the colonel's property for his children."

"Which of us would *not*, were it in our power? Between three and four hundred thousand pounds, Barlow assures me (and he has a nephew a clerk in the India House), in ready cash too! Worth twice as much as an estate of the same nominal value, as times go. Why, a single year's income would make a noble provision for our boys."

"The more reason, my dear Markham, that Mr. Hamlyn, who is rolling in riches, should have the generosity to leave a chance for other people. What is there in this world that man does not enjoy? What is there invented, year after year, in England, to promote health, comfort, or enjoyment, that does not find its way to Dean Park? Town and country, Ovington and Braxham, Birmingham or Warwick, everything that is best is bespoken for the Hamlyns. *Who* is served first, pray, the Duke of Elvaston, or Lord Vernon, or Richard Hamlyn, Esq.? Why, the banker! the banker, with his money down on the nail! the banker, who has no knowing steward to extort per centage from the tradespeople, but always his hand in his pocket, and a good long purse at the bottom of it!"

"I am sure *we* have no reason to find fault with his good fortune," observed Dr. Markham, warmly. "Never were the church's dues kept back a quarter of an hour by Richard Hamlyn—as punctual as the parish-clock in all his payments! And then, such an example to the poor: never betrayed into an angry word or harsh measure; his family as constant to divine service as Rugson the clerk. Fair or foul, rain or shine, when was the Dean Park pew ever empty? The very servants might be cited for their exemplary behaviour; and as to the banker's wife, show me her equal for sterling sense and equability of temper! Verily, her price is above rubies."

"An easy matter for people to keep an even temper who are never ruffled by the difficulty of making two ends meet," observed poor Mrs. Markham, a *leetle* jealous. "Life goes glib enough for those who roll through it on golden castors!"

"I am sure, my dear love, *we* have little cause to complain," cried the conscientious vicar. "The living is moderate, 'tis true—four hundred a year, and the Easter offering, is not an archbishopric. But it is competence, my dear Kitty! and then think of the incalculable advantages we derive from having such a friend as Mr. Hamlyn. Think how kindly he has managed our little fortune for us, with as much interest as if we had belonged to his family. *Your* three thousand pounds my dear, and the fifteen hundred of my college savings, would have remained £4500 to the day of doom, for any power *I* had of multiplying the product; but, instead of the miserable hundred and sixty pounds a year we should have got from the public funds (which, between ourselves, Kitty, have been so shifted about of late years that one never feels certain a government sponge may not be applied some fine morning to wipe them out altogether), Hamlyn managed to obtain me two hundred per annum, at once, by an excellent mortgage. For the last five years the interest has been accumulating, for I had rather go without butter to my bread than touch a shilling of what I always promised you to lay by as a provision for the boys—"

"And poor little Kitty," interposed the wife, stoutly.

"So that, in addition to what now amounts to two hundred and forty pounds per annum, we have nearer six thousand pounds than five to bequeath to the children, if it pleased the Almighty to call us to himself. Now all this, my love, as you ought never to forget, is Hamlyn's doing!"

"I never *do* forget it!" replied poor Mrs. Markham, "and I suspect *he* never forgets it either; at least, when anything goes wrong in the parish, or the churchwarden gives him trouble, he addresses you in a tone far less respectful than he does Mr. Ramsay, his butler."

"But for this security for our family," added Dr. Markham, earnestly, "we should be unable, out of my small living, to do half we *now* do for the poor."

"We should certainly be obliged to think twice about a thousand trifles which are now never missed!" replied Mrs. Markham, almost softened.

"Not that there is much call upon us for *more* than trifles," added her husband, in a tone of compunction. "I wish you could hear all Hurst of Braxham says to me about my good fortune in having such a parishioner as Hamlyn the banker! The schools and infirmaries of Ovington supported by *him* were cited in the Education Committee before the House, and mentioned in the Quarterly Review! Moreover, Hamlyn's connexion with the County Institution, the Lunatic Asylum, County Hospital, foundation schools, and so forth, is of inestimable advantage to the poor people of Ovington."

"Very true! Still I cannot divest myself of the idea that his connexion with these charities is purely a matter of business. To one he is treasurer; the others bank with his firm. It is not, for instance, like the good Samaritan out-of-the-heart sort of charity that opens the purse-strings of Colonel Hamilton!"

"My dearest wife, I could almost fear you were getting envious of the prosperity of the Hamlyns!" said the vicar, gravely. "Must I

say to you, like the preacher of old, 'Instead of a friend, become not an enemy; for thereby shalt thou inherit an ill name, even as a sinner that hath a double tongue?'"

"I dare say I am very wrong," replied his wife; "if *you* say so, I *must* be wrong. But for all that, I cannot help feeling that Mr. Hamlyn (to use Mrs. Johnston's expression) has fixed his fangs into the good old man at Burlington Manor."

"Mrs. Johnston? What! the colonel's housekeeper? You don't mean to say you have allowed that gossiping old woman to run on to *you*, as she sometimes tries to do to *me*, about the colonel's private affairs?"

"It was no fault of mine, Markham. You invited her to tea, to hear the school-children sing their hymn, on Christmas eve. *I* have no housekeeper's room, like the Hamlyns, nor could I ask a lady in a real India shawl and Leghorn bonnet to sit down in my bricked kitchen; so, as you were dining at Dean Park, she took her tea in the parlour."

"And there you sat together, seasoning your hyson with scandal about my friend Hamlyn!"

"Indeed, I did no such thing! Mrs. Johnston naturally spoke of her master, whom, having been in his service thirty years, she loves like a brother; and *she* declares, poor woman, that nothing has gone right in the Hamilton family from the moment Mr. Hamlyn got the management of his affairs! The children were sent off to Europe, fine healthy babes, and one after the other all dropped off."

"Does the old lady accuse poor Hamlyn, then, of poisoning his friend's children?" cried the doctor, laughing outright at the earnest tone of his wife.

"Not quite. But I believe she *really* thinks him gifted with the evil eye! Because it suited the banker, she says, to stake down her master within the clutch of Dean Park, away from London and his friends, the poor old man was hustled out of his fine house in Portland Place, where there was a housekeeper's room fit for an empress."

"At his age, *hustled* out of his house! My dear Kitty!"

"And now they are down in the country, she complains, all his rarities, all his good things, find their way to Dean Park—mangoes—buffaloes'-humps—oranzetas. Day after day, the finest flowers in the conservatory are cut for Miss Hamlyn; and whenever, in Anderson's time, there used to be a dish of early fruit or vegetables, off it went in a basket to Dean, as—"

"Come, come, come!" interrupted the doctor, "*we* can testify that a vast number of those baskets found their way to the Vicarage!"

"I don't deny it, and so would double the number were it not for the Hamlyns, who, Heaven knows, have forcing-houses enough of their own. They certainly manage to feather their nest, while other birds, less active, are driven forth from theirs! Poor Lady Burlington! Poor little Sir Hugh! Little did I think, when ten guineas were sent down to the village to ring for that dear boy's birth, as son and heir to one of the finest estates in the county, that, within five years afterward, the child and mother would be in exile, and the father in his grave!"

"I suppose you are now wanting to prove that Hamlyn is the cause of Sir Roger Burlington's flinging away his money on the turf?"

"I *might*, perhaps, without much difficulty! If Mr. Hamlyn had not facilitated the mortgages on his estates, Sir Roger would not have been able to embarrass his property to such an extent."

"Where there is a will to be extravagant there is always a way. At all events, Hamlyn's capital management in letting the manor will bring the minor round, so that he need never be the worse for his father's improvidence."

"I shouldn't be much surprised if it were to prove that Mrs. Hamlyn was a trifle the better for it," murmured Mrs. Markham, but in so low a voice (as she finished replacing in their velvet partitions the handsome ivory backgammon men presented to the doctor by Colonel Hamilton) that the vicar, finding his spouse in an unreducible humour of opposition to his patron the banker, judged it better to turn a deaf ear, and light his candle for bed.

The vicar might have spared all attempt at defence! The blame of stewards'-rooms or parsonage-parlours was about as important to the well-established and self-sufficing reputation of Hamlyn the banker, as the ripple of a midsummer sea to the stability of the Eddystone Lighthouse! Established on his Lombard-street throne as firmly as the sovereign on that of St. James, Richard Hamlyn might boldly bid defiance to petty slanders. All about him was fair and prosperous. His house was built upon a rock.

The firm of Hamlyn and Co., if unsupported by enormous capital in the private property of the partners, so as to connect it with the great financial operations of the kingdom, was trebly secure in its own moderation, steadiness, and good renown. Bernard Hamlyn, the junior and virtually sleeping partner, was the son of an uncle of Richard's, who, dying at the same period as the rash constructor of Dean Park, had left a schoolboy—and a remarkably dull one—on the hands of his nephew, as his successor to a moiety of the business. Luckily for the comfort of the more qualified cousin, Bernard, on attaining his majority, experienced no ambition to disturb the tenour of his excellent management. All he desired was, that his cousin should be punctual in his quarterly surrender of half the profits of the concern, deducting two thousand per annum for his own trouble in adjusting what, for treble that amount, Richard would not have remitted to any other hands than his own.

Richard Hamlyn was consequently sole monarch of all he surveyed in his temple of Mammon in Lombard-street. Not that it exhibited much superficial splendour to excite his vainglory. If it had "that within which passed show," show it disdained. The house was of dingy brick, with low-browed, smoke-stained ceilings, and desks and counters of discoloured mahogany; unlike those gorgeous banking-houses of the day (resembling gin-palaces in more particulars than one), which seem to have thriven, like parasite plants, out of the substance of others. The walls of the counting-house were of stucco, discoloured to a sallow sootiness of complexion almost rivalling that of their proprietor. Even the timepiece appended thereunto was an oldfashioned piece of goods, monoptical and full-orbed, like the staring cyclopean eye of Time, keeping watch over the quill-driving community below.

Whenever a defaulter entered that grim tabernacle of money-changing to account for a dishonoured acceptance, explain away an ugly

balance-sheet, or implore indulgence for a pending claim, the rigidly business-like character of the spot insinuated in iron whispers, as in Dante's Inferno, that "*ogni speranza*" might as well be left on the threshold. Whereas, when a new client, well to do in the world, and about to make a heavy deposite, pushed *his* way through the swing-doors, whose panes were fiercely defended by a strong network of brass, he was apt to murmur, "Good! business-like, and good! No show, no flummery, no take in." Even the mechanical demureness wherewith the middle-aged clerk took down his name and address, returning, in the same unconcerned manner, his own receipt for the thousands or tens of thousands "to account for on demand," inspired more confidence than the whipper-snapper moppings and mowings of West End obsequience.

In that vast, dingy, dreary chamber, however, with its double row of desks and stools, its leaden standishes and buff-bound folios, its foul atmosphere and factory-like whirring murmur—in that chamber, presenting no single object pleasing to the ear or eye, a mere organ, as it were, among the viscera of commerce, a foul, unsightly thing indispensable to the vitality of the civic frame—in that joyless, loveless, graceless spot, whatever the banker might become among the domestic irritations of Dean Park, "Richard was himself again!" the Napoleon of the numeration-table, the Talleyrand of admiring stockbrokers and bewildered cashiers.

Strange to relate, little as the banker was liked elsewhere, in his house of business he was beloved. His clerks had either grown gray in the house, or were the sons of its antecedent graybeards. Among these, the banker was a demigod; partly because, in a region where pelf was the one thing needful, a strong box the ark of the covenant, and the multiplication-table the table of the law, the moneyed man, the man possessed both of the substance, Property, and the shadow, Credit, was a prophet—yea, more than a prophet; but also, in some measure, on account of his fair and generous dealings with all persons in his employ.

In the first place, he was a sultan without a vizier—"*l'état c'est moi*" being his Bourbonic rule of government. There was no confidential clerk to "principal" it over the rest; and the counting-house was the only republic in Europe smaller than that of San Marino, or possessing a more absolute president. Scarcely one of the clerks, however, who had not, at some moment or other, become the object of munificence on the part of his master, either at his marriage, the sickness of a child, the death of a parent, or some other domestic exigency, which appeared to reach the ears of the head of the firm as if carried thither by a bird of the air. Nay, on two occasions within the experience of those who at present plied their quills in the service of Richard and Bernard Hamlyn and Co., a sprouting Coutts—(for, after all, the renowned Thomas Coutts, out of whose substance dukes and duchesses have sprung like mushrooms, was but a banking-house clerk!)—a sprouting Coutts, on the eve of falling into the abyss of dissipation, or, rather, the quagmire of lowborn, vulgar vice—had been reclaimed by a private and fatherly admonistation on the part of the grave banker, accompanied by the means of wiping off the pecuniary portion of the stigma incurred. These were acts of great mercy, or strokes of great policy; like the visit of Napoleon to his plague-stricken soldiers, or of Louis Philippe to a cholera hospital. At all events, the clerks thus gratuitously obliged became the faithful freedmen of a new Cæsar.

Every day, when Hamlyn passed through the counting-house—spruce, black, lustrous—with a brow serene as that of Canning, and a smile as bland as that of Peel—to issue forth into the city-throng (where wealth modestly walks the streets, and the shabby fellow you run against at the corner of Cornhill carries, perhaps, sixty thousand pounds, in bank-notes, in the inner pocket of his well-buttoned but seedy surtout), the clerks nearest the window would peer over the blinds to watch, with eyes of affection, his exit into the street, where hats were respectfully touched to him by all the men of substance, while the sweeper at the crossing for once forbore to be vociferous, so certain was he of receiving a spontaneous gratuity from "*good* Mr. Hamlyn!"

Though the head of the firm of Hamlyn and Co. scrupulously refrained from flourishing at any moment in the eyes of his people the insignia of his opulence—though he arrived in Lombard-street from Cavendish Square in the same shabby cabriolet which had made its journey thither daily for years, so punctual to its minute that, had Hamlyn and his groom been wanting, the old bay horse would doubtless have conveyed the vehicle in safety among the coal-carts and omnibuses of the Strand, and stopped, from the force of habit, at precisely eleven minutes and a half past two at the compting-house door, they loved to know that an admirably-appointed equipage would convey their respected principal at half past seven to his dinner at the Speaker's, or the Archbishop of Canterbury's, or some wealthy country baronet of a client's in Curzon-street or Eaton Square. Rejoicing in the solid comfort of his establishment, they were proud to feel that dukes were his guests, and privy councillors his claret companions; and, on the mornings following a debate, of which "Mr. Hamlyn next rose" formed a prominent feature in the columns of the daily papers, the Times and Herald belonging to the neighbouring chop-houses assumed an additional coating of thumb-grease, thanks to the diligent and reiterated perusal of the clerkhood of Hamlyn and Co.

It was indeed gratifying, after efforts of eloquence such as had drawn forth the thanks of the Chamber of the Exchequer, and groans of anguish from the opposition benches, to find their great man calm and affable as usual; when even the clerk, whose function it was to inscribe the names of Hamlyn and Co. in the subscription lists brought round to the merchants and bankers of the metropolis, whether for the erection of a statue to some eminent slayer of men, or hospital for the sick and maimed created under his slaughter, could scarcely refrain from adding an additional flourish to the "Co.," which at present represented only the refractory Henry, and a sickly son of Bernard Hamlyn, still under birchment at Harrow.

In his dingy little skylighted back shop or parlour—the consulting room of his financial science, the boudoir of his moneyed leisure—Richard Hamlyn, surrounded by his iron safes and deed chests, was entitled to seclude himself like some alchemist or necromancer of the olden time, saving that *he* was successful in producing, amid its gloomy solitude, that magic gold in which the crucibles of the former were fatally

wanting. It was only in case some grand exigency, some claim of unwonted magnitude, or the appeal of some powerful constituent having advice to ask as well as money to deposite, that the head clerk presumed to knock at the door of this sanctum, with intimation that "Mr. Hamlyn was wanted."

On the day, for instance, when Colonel Hamilton and Doctor Markham were bowling away, as merrily as four horses could carry them, across Northamptonshire towards Cambridge, a modest "May I speak to you, if you please, sir, for a moment?" had enabled Spilsby, the bald-headed chief clerk, to usher into the consulting-room one of their favourite clients, Dr. Grantham, an eminent physician, whose practice of ten thousand per annum placed him, in the opinion of the firm, on a level with Boerhaave or Galen.

"I am intruding, I fear?" said he, addressing Hamlyn, who rose to press him affectionately by the hand. "But I want, my dear sir, to ask you a little word of friendly advice. "We doctors," continued he, with a smile, "are accused of making quick work with patients who ask *us* for a bit of friendly advice! But with you I will dare my fate."

"Pray sit down!" exclaimed Hamlyn, pushing forward the least uneasy of two uncomfortable arm-chairs. "How is Mrs. Grantham?"

"Well, I thank you—that is, as well as the anxious mother of twelve children can ever pretend to be. I have brought you, not my week's fees to carry to account, but a lump of money for investment—a lump of money, the possession of which one of my driblet-earning calling ought, perhaps, to explain, lest he be suspected of having taken earnest for the despatch of a bishop or a cabinet minister! The truth is, my dear sir, that these ten thousand pounds comprehend the whole of my scrapings together till I was two-and forty, when I sold them out of the five per cents. (for there *were* five per cents. on the earth in those days!) for a very sacred purpose. My brother, Dick Grantham, had an opportunity of purchasing a prothonotaryship, and not a guinea in the world for the purpose. An insurance on his life, and his promise to repay me in ten years, determined me to risk what then constituted the sole provision for my children. You don't know my brother Dick, I fancy? The finest fellow breathing—the soul of a king, sir! I could hardly prevail on him to take the money, for he knew its importance to my family. However, through my solicitors, I got the business settled without his knowledge; and the consequence was, that Dick married and settled, and instead of a pettifogging attorney, became a gentleman, and the happiest man on earth; and last week, sir (a year within the term prescribed), my ten thousand pounds were paid over to the hands of my men of business! Now *they* suggest a mortgage by way of investment, and have got one to the tune of six per cent. on the estate of an Irish earl. But I don't like mortgages—least of all, on the estates of Irish earls—and so have come to ask your advice."

During this apostrophe, an ordinary observer would have seen nothing in Richard Hamlyn but the attentive, courteous banker, wishing his client to be a little more sparing of family details (time being money, as poor Richard says) but prepared to give his grave and disinterested verdict in the sequel. A more discerning eye would have discovered, in the recesses of his deep-set eyes, varying indications of triumph, rapacity, and mistrust. The banker evidently hated to hear of moneys being paid over to any man of business but a banker, just as Dr. Grantham would have been indignant had Hamlyn talked of consulting Keate or Brodie about a child sick of the scarlatina.

"I dare say you fancy," resumed Dr. Grantham, attributing his silence and hesitation to unconcern, "you, with your millionary, Rothschildish, stock-exchange ideas, that the disposal of a little fleabite like these ten thousand pounds ought not to disturb my night's rest, or spoil my appetite for my roast mutton! But let me tell you, my dear Hamlyn, that we poor fellows, who pick up our guineas as pigeons peas, one at a time, instead of accomplishing thousands as *you* do by a lucky turn of the money-markets or news of an insurrection at Barcelona, are obliged to look sharp after our farthings! I'm in the receipt of a noble income! but I and *it* may drop to-morrow; for, as in most professions, we doctors wear ourselves out in working for nothing, so that, when *something* comes, we are almost past our labour! The insurance offices try to make me believe that, in spite of my jolly face, I'm a poor crazy fellow; and that, instead of living to the age of Methuselah, as I threaten, my apoplexy stares them in the face. In short, my dear sir, I am not so well off but that these ten thousand constitute a vital object to my bantlings. What do you advise me to do? Government securities? East India bonds? Railway shares? WHAT?"

"If you will give me leave, I will think it over," replied the banker, unknitting the brows which had assumed an attitude of cogitation. "These kind of investments depend, of course, in a great measure, on the position of the parties; whether a small, steady, certain income be the object, or sure eventual profit of larger amount. I was offered the other day, on my private account, an occasion of partnership in one of the most lucrative concerns in the city. My responsibilities as a banker forbidding *me* to involve myself in any speculation which could, by any chance or possibility, affect the interests of the firm, I could not entertain the proposal, concerning which I am, at present, bound to secrecy. But I will consult the parties, and should they sanction me in extending the offer to a friend with the same facilities, believe me, my dear Grantham, few things in this world would afford me sincerer pleasure than to prove the means of obtaining so good a thing for a man I so truly value as yourself. The investment would secure a provision for two of your sons hereafter, by a share in—but I fear I must say no more! Be assured only that I shall regard and cater for *your* interest as I would for my own. I need not tell you that I am a family-man, and qualified to feel for the father of a family."

"My *dear* Hamlyn," cried the doctor, extending his hand (which he was rarely in the habit of doing, unless for the purpose of feeling a pulse or taking a fee!), "how shall I thank you for entering so readily into my views?"

"Not another word on the subject! Wait till I have been able to make good my promises," replied the banker. "Meanwhile, you had best leave the money with *us*. I fancy we can let you have exchequer-bills for it, if you think proper."

"Scarcely worth while, as a more durable in-

vestment is so shortly to be made," replied the doctor, producing from his pocket-book ten fair-complexioned notes for **One Thousand** each, which he had just received at Coutts's in exchange for the check of his solicitors in Lincoln's Inn.

"I will give you a simple receipt, then, and ask the favour of you to look in on Saturday," said Hamlyn, taking from the desk before him a file of paper forms, one of which he filled up with an acknowledgment for ten thousand pounds, and signed in the name of Hamlyn and Co.

"A thousand thanks," cried the doctor, as grateful as though he were accepting, instead of conferring an obligation. "On Saturday, then!" continued he, taking his consultation-book from his pocket, and inscribing the date among those of his professional visits; "on Saturday, at three."

To such a man as Grantham, it was indispensable to do the honours of the house; and Hamlyn accordingly suited the action to the word, after saying, "*Pray* let me see whether your carriage is in waiting!" In spite of his visiter's prohibitions, he accompanied him through the banking-house towards the door, more than one of the clerks squinting upward from his laborious ink-letting to examine the outward man of the client honoured by the personal escort of the head of the house, while a girl with a shabby shawl pinned over her still shabbier gown, and a porter with a knot on his head, both of whom were staring away their impatience in the background, with small checks to be cashed after their betters had been served, stood aside for the passage of the spruce, comely, well-fed gentlemen, as respectfully as though majesty itself were in presence.

"Mr. 'amlyn, I b'lieve, sir. Please, sir, I'd be glad of a few minuts with you," said a decently-dressed woman in black, intercepting the passage of the banker on his return through the counting-house to his private room, after parting with the doctor.

"My clerk, ma'am, will attend to you instantly. Here, Spilsby!" cried Mr. Hamlyn, beckoning over the counter the bald-headed clerk, who was at that moment assisting the cashier in the payment of checks; trying, as he spoke, to escape from her detaining hand into his *sanctum sanctorum*.

"I'd rather a deal, sir, with your leave, settle with one o' the partners, sir," persisted the woman; and something in the wilfulness of her appeal instantly relieved the experienced banker from an apprehension, inspired at the first glance by her mourning suit and withered face, that he was about to be bothered with the dolefuls of a widow with one of those prodigious families of orphans, which newspaper advertisements are constantly providing, in their largest capitals, for the tender mercies of "THE HUMANE WHOM HEAVEN HAS BLESSED WITH AFFLUENCE."

"Be good enough to step this way, madam," said he, his countenance relaxing from its sudden contraction; and releasing Spilsby by a nod, he opened the door of the Blue Chamber, which his companion seemed scarcely less awe-struck at entering than if it were the royal closet.

"You remember me now, sir, I dare say! Jane Darley, sir," said she, hesitating about taking the offered chair, and fumbling with her cloak as though her hands were trying to knead her into courage; "widder of John Darley, sir, as kept the tap o' Lemon-tree Yard," she continued, seeing that the stony-faced banker made no sign of recognition; "John Darley, sir, as banked with you, and the good gentleman your father as was, afore you."

Richard Hamlyn bowed thankfully, as expected; having been long aware that people of Jane Darley's class, who have ever deposited a hundred pounds in the hands of a banker, consider themselves thenceforward main props of the solidity of the firm.

"I was *sure* you'd recollect, sir, when you was once put upon rememb'ring!" resumed the widow, with growing confidence, "'cause you an't likely to have forgot the four hundred pouns, sir, you sold out for me when I had to set up my son Tummas in business."

Again the banker bowed, though less thankfully.

"Which was the reason, sir, I axed particular to see yourself, instead of leaving matters of such consequence to the young gentlemen I spuk to without. John Darley, sir, if you remember, left me his hegs-heketricks, and a deal of trouble it's been to me, with the debts to call in—many on 'em bad uns, I'm sorry to say—besides the tap t' attend to."

"I rather think, madam," interrupted Hamlyn, "that my clerk, Mr. Spilsby, has made your affairs his especial consideration, and he is therefore, perhaps, better qualified to—"

"I ax your pardon, sir," replied the widow Darley, again driven to the resource of fumbling her cloak for a countenance. "I don't think he've studied 'em at all; for when I wanted to give *him* the four 'undred poun to sell back into the funds—"

"To *buy* into the funds," amended the banker, in a low voice.

"He wanted to give me a receipt, sir, all as one as if I was paying a debt; which, as you know, sir, neither John Darley nor me was ever á farden beholden to the firm," continued the widow, with an air of injured dignity.

"You wish, in short, that we should purchase for you the value of four hundred pounds, in consols?" demanded Hamlyn, coming to the point. "In the name of Jane Darley, widow, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; in the name of Jane Darley, widder, sir, of Lemon-tree Yard! for I still keep the tap, sir. After poor John Darley was taken away, sir, I found myself with—"

"You have brought the amount in question, I think you said, madam?" persisted the banker.

"I've brought the money, sir, and the stock-receipts for the last sums as John Darley sold in—"

"*Bought* in," again amended the banker.

"Just in order to show you, sir, whereabouts my stock lies, that they may all be lumped together. For I've a hard matter, as it is, sir, to make out the queer ways of the Bank, when I goes to receive my half-hearly dividend; a lone woman, sir, is sure to be put upon in places like the stocks; and as I'm not in circumstances to employ an attorney for every trifle, I—"

"If it were agreeable to you, madam, we should be most happy to relieve you of the trouble," observed Mr. Hamlyn, gravely. "Your dividends may be received with those of the house, and either carried to your account, or paid over to you, as most agreeable."

"I'm sure, Mr. 'amlyn, sir, you're most kind and consid'rate, sir," replied the widow Darley,

her nervous twitchings of the cloak subsiding into a series of grateful courtesies; "and I return you many thanks, sir. John Darley always used to say, sir, poor feller, that *your* bank was as safe as the Bank of England; and, God knows, 'tis a deal civiller, for *there* they snap one up as if one came shop-lifting instead of only wanting to ax for one's own."

"If you will intrust these papers to *me*, madam, I will take care to have a power of attorney drawn out, and forwarded to you for signature," said Hamlyn, with the most conciliating blandness.

"I return you many thanks, sir. I am sure, sir, when I come to you about buying out the four undred poun' when I set up poor Tummas in the Borough, sir (as tallow-chandler, sir, and a very comfortable bus'ness he's made of it!), I little thought I should get my money back again, out of the fire, as a body may say. However, please God, I did my duty to him, as John Darley's hegs-heketricks, and—"

"Four hundred pounds!" said Mr. Hamlyn, in a sonorous, business-like voice, after having counted over eighty crumpled, greasy five-pound notes, conveying both to the smell and touch indications of their transit through the hands of Thomas Darley, the Borough tallow-chandler. "My clerk will wait upon you to-morrow morning in Lemon-tree Yard."

"And with that, my dear Mrs. Snaggs," said the widow Darley (when relating the scene, an hour afterward, over a tumbler of brandy and water, in the dark cupboard denominated a back-parlour by her friend and neighbour, Mrs. Snaggs, the corn-chandler's wife of the Lemon-tree stable-yard), "with that, my dear, he waited upon me to the door with the look of a lord, and yet so affable and so brotherly-like, as if 'twas a pleasure to him to do a service to the widder and fatherless! And so you see, Mrs. Snaggs, I'm to be spared the trouble of rigging myself out twice a year, and omnibus fares, and what not, to go bobbing up and down them bank offices—shoved in here, and pushed out there—and a surly clerk axing me at last (after looking at my papers) whether my name was Jane Darley, as if 'twas like to be anything else! And all's to be done for me as if I was a lady in the land!"

"And a mint o' money you'll be charged for the doing on it!" cried Mrs. Snaggs, who was keeping an eye to the shop through the glass partition, the chocolate-coloured window-curtain being carefully pinned aside to facilitate the good lady's watch over her binns of peas and beans, and sample-sacks of corn.

"Not I! Leave *me* alone, Mrs. Snaggs, to take care o' the main chance! 'Kind words butter no parsnips,' thinks I; so I 'spressly asked what would be the charge. And what d'ye think was his ans'er? Why, that 'twas the dooty o' the firm to obleege the widder of an old and respectit constit'yent like John Darley! I vow to goodness I could have kissed Mr. 'amlyn's precious feet at that moment, for the sort of heavenly smile with which he talked of respecting my poor dear good man as is dead and gone!"

And, thanks to the touch of nature, or the mahogany-coloured glass of brandy and water she had gradually emptied, the widow proceeded to bathe with tears the memory of John Darley of Lemon-tree Yard, and the urbanity of Hamlyn the banker.

CHAPTER XI.

"Why did I change my college life,"
He cries, "for benefice and wife?"

LLOYD.

On the day appointed for Colonel Hamilton's excursion to Cambridge, the travellers set forth with the spirits of boys of fifteen rather than of threescore. They were the very men to take delight, like Dr. Johnson, in being whirled along a good road in an easy chaise, and still greater in chirrupping away the evening at a crack inn, over a roaring fire, amid the ringing of bells, the scuffling of waiters, the rattle of night-coaches, and the fumes of Port-wine negus and brandy punch.

With Dr. Markham, the expedition amounted to a party of pleasure, For the good vicar had not lost sight of his own sober fireside half a dozen times in as many years; and though somewhat formalized in deportment by the gravity of his functions, and still more by having officiated as a college tutor during the early part of his life, was by nature almost as genial of temper and temperament as the old colonel.

Many were the merry anecdotes mutually confided of a subaltern's life in the East, and a sizar's pariaship at home, which enlivened the fireside of "the best inn's best room" in the good town of Northampton, where they stopped for the night; and Dr. Markham retired to rest, almost ashamed to reflect in how different a mood of mind he was about to re-enter Cambridge from that in which he had departed, with his bride, nine years before, to take possession of his college living. The worthy man did not, of course, perceive that he was by no means the worse Christian for being somewhat less of a prig.

On the morrow they were off early, intending to arrive for an hour's daylight before dinner-time, that Colonel Hamilton might engage his young friend to join them at the Hoop.

"A queer fancy of this lad of Hamlyn's!" said the colonel, after settling himself in a comfortable corner of his easy chariot. "A *very* queer fancy, to spend his last vacation scampering over Italy, and *this* one at Cambridge, with such a home as Dean Park open-armed to receive him!"

"He is reading hard for his degree," replied the doctor, always cautious in his remarks where the family at Dean was concerned (for the benefactions of Hamlyn to the parish placed him before the vicar in the light of a patron), "and may find it necessary to repair the idleness produced by his summer's pleasures."

"But with Henry Hamlyn's talents, doctor, he might have been pretty sure of passing?"

"Not, however, of attaining the high honours expected of him."

"But why the deuse *must* he attain high honours? What's the use on't? *He* don't pretend to a mitre or the woolsack; and what the plague a better banker will he make for having strained every nerve for university distinctions?"

"A man is never the worse thought of in public or private life for having proved himself a first-rate scholar," replied the vicar. "Look at Macauley, look at Canning, look at—"

"At present I only want to look at Henry Hamlyn, my dear doctor!" interrupted Colonel Hamilton; "and I see as plain as a pikestaff that all these classics and metaphysics have served to put him sadly out of conceit of Cocker's Arithmetic! Is there common sense in it,

I only ask you? is there common sense in it, for a young fellow to give up five or six of the best years of his life to the acquirement of two languages talked nowhere on the face of the globe; whose works are all translated into good, sensible English; and which, to *my* thinking, since they're called the *dead* languages, were just as well *buried* and put out of the way?"

The doctor's pride of scholarship forbade all affectation of acquiescence in this illiberal proposition; and if Walter Hamlyn had decided the colonel to be a Goth, the vicar was beginning to regard him as a Vandal!

"I tell ye what, doctor," resumed the old gentleman, vexed at his silence, "in my opinion, if all the time and brains expended upon Latin and Greek for the last five hundred years had been applied to the study of the sciences, which really forward the progress of mankind, we should have been millions of miles nearer the moon, and thousands nearer the centre by this time; and so, maybe, have given the poor their coals, this bitter winter, for sixpence the chaldron, and sold 'em their linsey-woolsey at twopence a yard!"

Doctor Markham ventured a word or two concerning the value of moral enlightenment and mental civilization to the welfare of mankind, but was speedily interrupted.

"Pho, pho, pho! If your law-makers or gospel-preachers require the addition of Plato and Socrates to teach 'em their bus'ness, what becomes of Christianity?" cried Colonel Hamilton. "The Bible, sir, and algebra, afford ballast enough for any man's understanding that wants settling! As to the influence of learning on individual prosperity, look at *me*, doctor! As there was then no Haileybury by way of preparation for Indy, I was dunced over Greek and Latin at the Charter House from ten till fifteen, and from that day to this have never opened a classic! Fortunately for me, I happened to have what is called a turn for mechanics (as my family might have found out from my having managed to manufactur' a redcap's draw-bucket afore I was breeched!). So, on reaching Bombay, having already a crotchet in my head which determined me to fight like a dragon to conquer an independence, I set my shoulder to the wheel, and studied at the college there till I made some figure in the engineering department. Once employed, I'd the luck to compass a great hit by the invention of a caisson for a lock on the military canal at Chinderapore, where I was stationed; and my fortune was made, sir. I got employment, and employment begot spirits and zeal. And now pray tell me, what would all the Homer and Horace in the world have done towards helping me to scrape together a plum? whereas, if I'd gone out to Indy a first-rate mathematician, a first-rate civil engineer—"

"We *do* rather pique ourselves at Cambridge on our mathematical proficiency!" slyly rejoined the doctor. "However, to return to the present pursuits of young Mr. Hamlyn, I fancy that, being less pampered by his father than his handsome elder brother, Henry may find his college life a pleasanter thing than the formality of Cavendish Square or seclusion of Dean Park. You don't know what an exciting existence is that of a young man distinguished in the University, and endowed with Henry Hamlyn's means, both worldly and intellectual!"

And forthwith the good doctor began to enlarge anew, as though he had never before touched upon the subject, on the pleasures of college cheer, college honours, college sociality—the ale, milk-punch, and aristocratic "winings" of Trin. Coll.; which, having the usual influence of a thrice-told tale, the sonorous breathings of Hamilton in his cozy corner (as if keeping cadence to the rising of the postboys in their stirrups) soon announced that he was happy in the land of dreams.

While enjoying himself in that aërial region, an unlucky change came over the face of the earth. A drizzly rain began to beat against the carriage-windows, shutting out the scarcely more cheering prospect of the county of Hunts; and when the colonel began rubbing his eyes at last, on being jogged by his companion as they entered the High-street of Cambridge, there was unquestionably nothing in the scene to justify the excitement and exultation beaming in the looks of the D.D. of St. John's. The plashy pavement and streaming kennels of a dingy, tortuous street, along which a few draggle-suited collegians were straggling through the mists of a rainy evening, amid half-lighted shops, whose twinklings were scarcely discernible through the dim windows, imparted no enlivenment to a spot, the quaint antiquities of which require fresh air and broad daylight to assume their more imposing dignity in the eyes of the stranger.

"By George, doctor! you deserve to have lived and died the fellow of a college—if you compare this close, fusty town with the open pastures of Dean Park!" cried Colonel Hamilton, as the carriage bowled onward to the Hoop, where the jingling bell called forth the alacrity of landlord and waiters to do homage to the proprietor of so handsome a carriage; some old gentleman of fortune, they decided, come to matriculate his son and heir at Cambridge, under the instructions of the reverend private tutor, his companion.

Either his nap or the rainy afternoon had operated unfavourably on his spirits; for Colonel Hamilton began on the very threshold to institute unfavourable comparisons with the comfortable, wholesome, hearty country inn of the day before.

Instead of the straight-combed hair, blue coat, and corduroys of the half-host, half-farmer of their last halting-place, the head-waiter and his subs displayed an impertinent *fac simile* of the young men whose cigars they were in the habit of lighting, and whose current accounts for broiled fowls, devilled kidneys, bishops, and cardinals, they were in the habit of "leaving," so as to authorize an entry in their master's books of—"to bill delivered."

Ushered into a gaudy parlour, scented with spirits and tobacco so as to resemble the barrack-room of a marching regiment far more than was compatible with the decorum of Alma Mater, the colonel was pursued by the head-waiter, who stirred up the already roaring fire till it emulated the blast furnace of a foundry, while the subordinates followed, with officious zeal, bustling in the chaise-seats and dressing-boxes they knew must be instantly removed into the bedrooms, before Johnston, who was paying the postboys, could prevent their interference.

While Colonel Hamilton stood as near the hearth-rug as the tremendous fire of glowing cinders would allow, wondering when the exit of these troublesome bustlers would admit of shutting the door to the exclusion of the damp draught of evening air, the crimson-faced host,

attired in a cobalt blue stock, made his appearance, bearing in his hand a strip of paper half a yard long, which, to any but a new comer within his gates, would have assumed an alarming aspect.

"Will you please to order dinner, sir?" said he, with the deference due to a traveller with four horses and an "own man" of Johnston's respectability.

"Can you tell me, pray, where Mr. Hamlyn of Trinity is to be found?" inquired the colonel in his turn, preoccupied with the object of his journey.

"No, sir, I can*not*, sir. Will you be pleased to order dinner, sir?" persisted the host, equally intent upon *his* object of the moment.

"I will thank you to inquire," said Colonel Hamilton, accepting the offered protocol as his best chance of obtaining immediate attention.

"John, inquire whether a Mr. Humbling's in college," said the host, addressing his head waiter; who, having in his turn commissioned a sub, Boots, or one of the "somebodies" always hanging about an inn yard, was despatched in search of information which nobody was interested to impart, leaving the hero in the blue stock to hazard a few observations to the supposed private tutor on the vexation of the afternoon having turned out rainy; while the eye of Colonel Hamilton wandered vacantly over the strip of paper in his hand, setting forth, with a perfection of caligraphy that did honour to the clerkship of the University, a catalogue of all the soups included in Mrs. Rundell's Domestic Cookery, all the fishes of the sea, and all the fowls of the poultry-yard, besides made dishes in endless variety.

Insufficiently versed in the habits of such resorts to know that the turbot he ordered would probably make its appearance in the shape of a brill, and the promised gravy soup as washy broth, with a dogger-bank of black pepper at the bottom, Colonel Hamilton, in the expectation of Henry Hamlyn's arrival, issued orders for as good a dinner as the yard of foolscap before him undertook to promise; and having so far benefited by the measure as to rid himself of the presence of the gentleman who so much resembled one of his own porter-butts dressed out by an advertising clothes-warehouse, waited patiently the return of his messenger.

A new persecution, however, now commenced. The bustling waiters, having removed the luggage, reappeared with trestles and trays, cruet-stands and bread-baskets; again leaving open the door, and beginning to lay the cloth and refold the napkins with as much fuss and emphasis as for a dinner-party of fourteen.

Still no answer arrived. The intelligence that "no Mr. Humbling was known in Trinity" not being likely to add an item to the bill, was withheld in order to be brought in by the landlord with the soup-tureen; nor was it till after repeated rings at the bell, and the despatchal of as many messengers as issue per diem from Downing-street during the session of Parliament, that intelligible answer was at length delivered to Colonel Hamilton, to the effect that "Mr. Henry Hamlyn, of Trinity, was *not* in college, having quitted Cambridge some days before for London."

"So, so, so!" cried Colonel Hamilton. "*This* is the way these youngsters impose upon the old fogeys. This admirable Crichton, who fancies himself too learned for a banker, and persuades his poor, fond, foolish mother and sister that he's sapping his brains out at Trinity, is most likely, at this moment, lounging on the Chain Pier at Brighton, or resolving the problems of the Christmas Pantomime! A pretty couple o' blockheads we look like, doctor, to have come so far on such a fool's errand!"

"Pray do not include *me*, my dear sir, in any such category!" cried Dr. Markham, good-humouredly. "*My* object will be fully answered in a pleasant journey, and a peep at the old spot where, before I became the happiest husband and person in England, I was the most contented old bachelor. Looking forward to a cheerful dinner and glass of wine with you, and beating up the quarters afterward of a few old college chums who still stick to their fellowships, I can afford latitude for my young friend's vacation rambles."

"I can't help wishing, however, that his dear good mother had contrived to get better information concerning the lad's movements, before she stimulated me to this wild-goose expedition!" was the colonel's secret but ever recurring reflection during dinner; and, deeply impressed as he was by the importance of his interposition, at such a crisis, to the happiness of the family he so dearly valued, the colonel, though cautious of avowing the extent of his uneasiness, could not altogether conceal from his companion his vexation at the disappointment. Already Dr. Markham had privately resolved to abstain from his threatened visit to St. John's, in order that the old gentleman might be comforted by his usual game at backgammon.

"I tell ye what, doctor," cried the colonel, when the waiters had delivered the travellers from their officious presence, "if it didn't *very* much signify to you, now you've got your furlough *where* you spent your leave of absence, I'd ask the favour of you to accompany me to-morrow to town (I've a vast mind for an interview with this boy before I'm a week older); and after a day or two in Lon'on, we'll back to Ovington, and surprise the good lady at the Vicarage with an account of our scapegrace exploit!"

"With all my heart—with all my heart!" replied Dr. Markham, readily conceiving that these precipitate movements had a more serious motive than the old gentleman was at liberty to avow. "I am prepared, like a faithful esquire, to follow the wanderings of my own liege knight, on condition, however, that you take a glance at King's College Chapel, and allow *me* one at my old shop, to-morrow, before we get into the carriage."

So reasonable a request was, of course, cheerfully acceded to, and at an earlier hour than the head-waiter judged it by any means becoming for "gemmen as travelled with four osses" to be astir, Markham was approaching the sober-suited home of his bachelorhood, preparatory to escorting the colonel to Trinity Chapel.

To Dr. Markham, it was like pressing the hand of an old friend to pass under the venerable gateway of St. John's; and, lo! on raising his eyes towards the narrow windows of the old rooms, through which, during sixteen years of his life, he had gazed, day after day, on that uneventful quadrangle, the contrast afforded by the loneless, cheerless gloom of the spot to his own happy, affectionate, independent home, excited such feelings of thankfulness in the heart

of the good vicar, that he was almost glad to be secure from encounter with his college friends while under their influence.

At that moment the past was revived, warm and like life around him, by the magic force of association. Not an angle of those ancient structures but had some peculiar interest in his eyes, not a tree in those college gardens but was connected with some incident of earlier years. The sound of the long-familiar bells recalled thronging thoughts and half-effaced aspirations. Echoes, long silent, were awakened in the depths of his heart. He seemed to live over again the days when his hopes of happiness were comprised in the acquiring of a modest home, over which a certain gentle Cousin Kitty was to preside, and become the mother of the olive-branches round about his table.

Heartfelt was the gratitude of the good vicar when he considered that the home, and the Cousin Kitty, and the olive-branches had been fully vouchsafed him, the prospects of his children, as well as the welfare of their parents, being secured, under the will of Providence, by the zealous aid of his friend, Hamlyn the banker.

Still overflowing with thankfulness were the good man's feelings when he rejoined Colonel Hamilton, who, having recovered, in a good night's rest, his disappointment at Henry Hamlyn's absence, was quite as ready to admire and praise as the most enthusiastic of Cantabs could desire. On emerging from the Chapel of Trinity, after a passing glance at Roubilliac's noble statue of Newton, into the imposing quadrangle, the colonel's ecstasies burst forth.

"By George! I begin to feel ashamed of all the treasons I uttered yesterday!" cried he. "Either the grave aspect of yonder solemn old dons, or the atmosphere of the place has bewitched me; for I feel disposed to recant my anticlassical heresies. In this quaint old spot, that seems proud to bear record of the greatness of the minds which, for so many centuries, have devoted themselves to study within its walls, one must not pretend to underrate the value of learning. In flashy, noisy Lon'on—amid the bustle o' business and whirl o' pleasure—one comes to fancy the gravity of philosophy all gammon. But here, it seems to attain a sort of Bible sanctity! One is forced to acknowledge that if it do not forward the labour of money-getting, or the sport of money-spending, it affords at least consolation to a solitary life. Old dunce as I am, I could find it in my heart to uncap, like an under-graduate, to yonder solemn old dons, who look as if nothing could move 'em that has happened on the face of the earth since the days of Herodotus."

"Yes, I remember fancying myself a prodigious philosopher so long as I was one of them!" replied the doctor.

> "'Illum non populi fasces, non purpura regum
> Flexit, et infidans agitans discordia fratres.'

Though I doubt whether aught in their morning's reading pleases them as well as the last bulletin from Cabool."

Colonel Hamilton, startled by the sound of a language which had rarely greeted his ears since he left the Charter-House, now proposed that, before they quitted Trinity, they should visit the rooms of Henry Hamlyn.

"I should like to inscribe my name with his own pen on his own table!" said he, "in proof hereafter of the reality of my visit."

And, having ascertained that during their absence Johnston was to settle the inn-account and see the horses put to, Dr. Markham, well acquainted with young Hamlyn's college tutor, obtained such credentials as opened the door of his rooms. From the same respectable source, the friends of the truant were supplied, unasked, with an earnest tribute to his merits. They had the satisfaction of hearing that, with the highest distinctions of the university, young Hamlyn conciliated a larger share of its affections than is usually accorded to the pet of the bigwigs.

"Henry is a general favourite," said Dr. Markham's learned friend; "so general, that I sometimes almost wonder at the severity of his application. Even at Cambridge, as Erasmus has it—'*Non desunt crassi quidem qui studiosos à libris deterreant;*' and I sometimes fear the best head in Trinity may come, like the thickest, to be broken, out of a tandem; and I confess I am as fond of my pupil as I am proud. By-and-by, when his imagination is a little sobered, and his warm-hearted enthusiasm tamed down into a more practical view of the things of this world, it will go hard but we hear of Hamlyn as one of the most distinguished men of his time. He has been a little overset by his foreign excursion. I never know what to make of my young men when they come back with their brains turned by Switzerland and the Rhine; but the brief madness usually flies off in the fumes of a few odes. They rhyme themselves sober again, and, after producing a new canto to Childe Harold, not *quite* as good as the first, fall to, as before, upon their more important studies.

After this indication to the leading foible of poor Henry, it did not surprise either the vicar or Colonel Hamilton, on being admitted by the gyp into his rooms, to find them, in addition to their simple, solid furniture, adorned with some admirable sketches of the Abruzzi, bearing the initials of H. H., and a selection from the finer engravings of Raphael Morghen after the chef d'œuvres of the ancient masters; in place of the glaring portraits of actresses and opera-dancers constituting the usual embellishment of a young man's lodgings. On a bracket between the windows, intended to support a clock, a highly-necessary companion of a student's leisure (but which, in half the other rooms of the college, would have exhibited a statuette of Taglioni or Fanny Elsler, or, at best, of the chaster graces of Mademoiselle Rachel), stood the cast of a splendid original bust by Gibson; a female head, purporting, as announced by the crescent on its brows, to represent the severe beauty of the Goddess of Night; the "queen and huntress, chaste and fair," of Ben Jonson. On the table stood a china vase, or flower-pot, containing what, at first sight, Dr. Markham pronounced to be a stump of blacklead pencil, so slight was the trace of foliage confirming the assurance of the gyp that it was a myrtle-tree, brought with great care and trouble by Mr. Hamlyn from some famous place in foreign parts, which he had strict orders to water carefully during his absence.

"A sprig of rubbish from Virgil's tomb, or the Grotto of Egeria, I'll be bound!" cried the colonel, with a hearty laugh. "Doctor, doctor, why don't you perform your salam to so classical a relic? Ten to one, the poor lad has got a sonnet to't in his note-book, and expects his verses and stunted laurels to flourish together. But GOD be gracious to me, what have we here!" cried he, a moment afterward, congratulating

himself that his rash exclamation had probably been unheard by the vicar, who was staring his eyes out at Henry's fine sketch of the ruins of Tusculum, classically explained by the gyp, watching over his shoulder, to be "Tullus's Willow at Room."

The letter, a single glance at which had extorted so vehement an ejaculation from Colonel Hamilton, was lying unopened on Henry Hamlyn's desk, accompanied by a note or two, and a slip of paper having the appearance of a bill, all of which had evidently arrived during his absence.

With a degree of indiscretion (pardonable or unpardonable, who shall decide?), Colonel Hamilton, perceiving that the doctor was still thoroughly absorbed by a splendid print of the Transfiguration which constituted the masterwork of the Hamlyn Gallery, raised it from the desk, and deliberately examined the superscription and seal, the paper and postmark; forming inferences, perhaps, from its thickness and complexion, of the length and nature of the epistle. Nay, after laying it down once, as if he had satisfied himself fully on these points, such was the old gentleman's pertinacious interest in the correspondent of the young graduate of Trinity, that he actually took it a second time from the desk; and, after a renewed and still more careful examination, replaced it on the table.

"Of all the strange things I ever knew in this world, this is the strangest!" muttered he, when, after a liberal gratuity to the gyp, and a request that, on Mr. Hamlyn's arrival, the visit of Colonel Hamilton and Dr. Markham might be instantly announced to him, they quitted the rooms; nor could the utmost endeavours of Dr. Markham to revive his previous enthusiasm while proceeding through a hurried visit to King's College and Downing, obtain more than monosyllables from the preoccupied colonel.

So silent and mechanical were his movements, when, on reaching the Hoop, he hurried into his carriage, waiting at the door with the postboys in their saddles, that the pursy gentleman in the claret-coloured velvet girth felt convinced the brill of the preceding day had been detected, or that the charge of fifteen shillings a bottle for claret moved the old gentleman's displeasure; and, but that the waiters had the donation of Johnston safe in their pockets, they would have trembled for their half-crowns.

Dr. Markham was luckily too much absorbed by the numberless interests and associations reviving every moment around him to take heed of the colonel's absence of mind, and the carriage reached the Trumpington turnpike ere a syllable escaped his lips after the memorable exclamation betraying his discovery of some astounding mystery connected with Henry Hamlyn's correspondence. "By George! the *very* strangest thing in the world!" were fated to be his "few last words" in Cambridge.

CHAPTER V.

"Good-nature has an endless source of pleasure in it; and the representation of domestic life filled with its natural gratifications (instead of the vexations generally insisted upon in the writings of the witty) will be a very good office to society. It would be a lamentable thing that a man must be a philosopher to know how to pass away his time agreeably."—STEELE

"I WAS determined to take you by surprise, my dear Hamlyn," cried Colonel Hamilton, as, following close the footman who announced him, and followed closely in his turn by Dr. Markham, he entered the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, at what he supposed to be a late hour for tea.

But if he had calculated on seeing an expression of joyful astonishment portray itself in the countenance of the banker, he was speedily undeceived. After a stammered greeting to two such unexpected visiters, nothing remained apparent in Hamlyn's face and deportment but an air of embarrassment and chagrin.

The tea-tray had been already removed; and, on their arrival, Hamlyn was seated in his slippers, in all the disarray of domestic ease, beside a writing-table, covered with papers, amid which stood a reflecting lamp. It was clear to the observant eye of Dr. Markham, that the banker, intently occupied in some important calculation, upon which he judged it worth while to expend his leisure hours, wished them back at Ovington, or anywhere else, a hundred miles from Cavendish Square.

It was, in fact, the good colonel himself who was most "surprised" on the occasion! For he had felt assured of finding Henry Hamlyn with his father, most likely engaged in bitter altercation; instead of which, it was clear, from the first two or three words uttered by the banker, that he was unaware of his younger son being in town.

"Whom did you expect to find with me, my dear colonel, that you appear so astonished at my being alone?" said Hamlyn. "Believe me, so long as my family remains at Dean, I am quite as great a solitary in town as *you* at Burlington. Between the sporting turn of Walter and the studious turn of Harry, I am as much left to myself as though I had not a son to call my own!"

Luckily, the colonel had forewarned Dr. Markham that, on account of a disagreement in the Hamlyn family, no allusion must be made to his proposed visit to Henry Hamlyn.

"I'm not fond of mysteries and concealments, my dear doctor!" said he. "But between ourselves, it may enable me to serve all parties with a surer chance, if we say nothing at present of our little madcap trip to Cambridge. Luckily, poor Hamlyn is not given to asking idle questions, like that burly baronet of a brother-in-law at the Hyde. He'll take our journey as a matter of course. For I told him afore he left Warwickshire I must be up in town shortly, to look out for my daughter-in-law's arrival. So, if you love me, not a syllable in allusion to poor Harry!"

This prohibition having been enforced anew by a significant look, on learning from Hamlyn's grave announcement that his son was "reading hard at Cambridge," the vicar was not a little amused at the bungling efforts made by so poor a dissembler as the colonel to conceal that they had reached London by the northern instead of the western road.

Still, old Hamilton might have blundered and blundered on, without attracting the notice of his companion. For the greater the efforts of Hamlyn to talk chattily and do the honours of the tea-table, already replenished, the plainer it became, from sundry glances at his writing-table covered with papers, that his mind was ever and anon reverting to the occupation from which he had been disturbed by his friends.

"I conclude you have not yet had time since your arrival," observed the host, with a vagueness of eye that must have struck a more perspicacious man than Hamilton, "to make inquiries concerning Mrs. Robert's arrival?"

"Faith, I scarcely know *where* to make 'em, till I obtain the information from *you!*" replied the colonel.

"From *me?* I thought you were in frequent correspondence. *I* have not had the smallest communication with her (except the formal noting and payment of her jointure through the banking-house) for the last two years."

"I know it, I know it! Her last letter to me was dated from Florence, and told me I might look out for her about the middle of January. The middle will probably turn out the end. No woman with a journey of a thousand miles afore her was ever punctual to a week or so. But Ellen never told me what hotel she should stop at in her way through town."

"Hamilton seems to take me for a conjurer, and fancy I have the art of divining people's intentions?" said Hamlyn, addressing Dr. Markham, as if suddenly afraid of appearing to neglect his humbler guest; but, in reality, to distract the observant eye of the vicar from some object on which it appeared to settle near the writing-table.

"Don't flatter yourself! I don't think you a greater conjurer than myself, unless where scrip and omnium are concerned. I simply fancied you might be able to tell me to what hotel Lady Burlington was in the habit of resorting?"

"Lady Burlington? I thought you were talking of Mrs. Robert Hamilton?" interposed Dr. Markham, with a puzzled air.

"And so I am! They've been travelling together in Italy. When Ellen came down to visit you at Dean Park, my dear Hamlyn, on her marriage, she made acquaintance, it seems, with Lady Burlington; and meeting together thus strangely in a foreign country, already widows, and, as it were, in exile, they nat'rally struck up a friendship, poor things!"

Mr. Hamlyn appeared disagreeably startled by this explanation.

"It is therefore more than probable," pursued the colonel, "that Ellen, who knows little or nothing of Lon'on, will profit by her friend's experience about such a matter as the choice of a hotel."

"Likely enough!" observed Dr. Markham, seeing that Hamlyn was unprepared to reply. "And Lady Burlington, if I remember, always went to Mivart's. In Sir Roger's time, at least, I am *certain* they frequented Mivart's; for I well remember seeing them start from thence one morning for Ascot races; and I, who knew something of the entanglement of their affairs, could not help feeling sore at heart as I stood watching their showy four-in-hand turn the corner of Grosvenor Square."

"It is a most extraordinary thing that he should never have mentioned to me having made her acquaintance!" cried Hamlyn, after some minutes' silence, as if musing aloud.

"Who? Markam? Why, surely, you must have known pretty well the degree of acquaintance that subsisted between Overton Vicarage and Burlington Manor?" cried Colonel Hamilton, becoming alive to the absent, hurried manner of his friend.

"I—I was talking of—"

"I think you scarcely know *what* you're talking of, my dear fellow!" cried the colonel, slapping him on the back. "Were you o' Watty's age, I can tell you, I should fancy you were over head and ears in love!"

"I was talking of my son Henry and your daughter-in-law," said Hamlyn, stoutly, thinking it more prudent to speak out than incur the suspicion, in Colonel Hamilton's mind, of being a musing visionary. "I was expressing my surprise that my son should never have alluded to having met Mrs. Robert Hamilton in Italy."

"And how the plague d'ye know they *did* meet?" cried the colonel, on *this* point almost as curious as his friend.

"Because Henry spent some time in company with Lady Burlington. He brought me letters from her, and papers of consequence. But though, ere he hurried to Cambridge for the commencement of term, he spent a day with me here in town, alone, and freely discussing all the occurrences of his tour, I am certain, *quite certain*, he never hazarded the remotest allusion to a person so peculiarly interesting to the feelings of us all as—as—Mrs. Robert Hamilton."

"There's no accounting for the mysteries of young folks; or, rather, what they may or may not think worth mentioning. As Harry knew you'd not, in the first instance, shown yourself mighty partial to my poor daughter-in-law, he might fancy you did not care to hear of her intimacy with your friend Lady Burlington; or, maybe, to hear of her at all!"

"Still, a person so singularly beautiful and accomplished as Mrs. Robert cannot but have attracted the greatest attention abroad; and it would have been only natural to say how he found her looking, and whether as much admired as we suppose."

"She *is* strikingly beautiful, eh?" cried Hamilton. "How the deuse, then, came you to be always so indignant at what you called Bob's infatuation?"

"I might think her singularly lovely, yet an imprudent match for a young man of poor Robert's brilliant prospects."

"You're queer fishes, vastly queer fishes, you money-spinners!" cried Colonel Hamilton, almost pettishly. "You seem to think there's nothing better to be bought with money *than* money! What the plague could my poor boy get better, in exchange for his heirship to fifteen thousand a year, than a pretty young wife? However, we won't fight that battle over again, the only point ever in dispute between us! And since you say Mivart's is the place, we'll go and look after Ellen to-morrow morning, doctor, if you've no objection."

After a few inquiries on Hamilton's part about the party at Rotherwood Castle, and the health of the Marchioness of Dartford, purporting to change the conversation, and a little parish gossip between the banker and the vicar, the visiters re-entered their hackney-coach, and returned to Fenton's Hotel, to sleep soundly after three days of exertion so unusual in the even tenour of their sober lives.

But the sleep of the banker was fated to be less easy. His heart was disquieted within him. By nature mistrustful, and his mistrusts aggravated at times to torture by the consciousness of a load of concealments, new anxieties had been created in his mind by the sudden discovery of this unsuspected intimacy between the two women he liked least on earth.

Richard Hamlyn, whatever else might be his

weaknesses, had, it must be admitted, little leaning towards the gentler sex. A harassed, anxious life either inclines a man to put unlimited trust in the virtues of women, and derive his chief solace from their affectionate companionship, or to endure them as an inevitable encumbrance. Hamlyn, such was his austere nature, had adopted the latter alternative. Instead of reverencing the meek submission of his wife, he regarded her as an obstacle which he had conquered. Incapable of appreciating the greatness of her self-abnegation, he estimated her as merely one of the passive portions of his social existence. But Lady Burlington and Mrs. Robert Hamilton had thwarted his purposes; and these two women he loathed—yea, *loathed*—in spite of the "baited breath and whispering humbleness" with which, in their enforced intercourse, he was in the habit of accosting them.

Nevertheless, the widow of Sir Roger Burlington, young, fair, gentle, was a singular object for antipathy! It was scarcely possible to see a sweeter, more timid, or more feminine woman. Infirm of health, still more infirm of purpose, she was naturally at the disposal of those surrounding her who chose to be at the trouble of regulating her movements. But as the dove, in the exercise of its domestic functions, is said to acquire the ferocity of the eagle, as a wife and mother, a bereaved wife and anxious mother, Lady Burlington had assumed sufficient courage to defend the rights and interests of her only child from the somewhat arbitrary disposal of the banker; and, unused to opposition, least of all from a woman, Hamlyn had no patience with the fair and fragile-looking thing in its widow's cap and weeds, that presumed to have a will of its own touching the sale of an estate or paying off of a mortgage. Business was to *him* too solemn and peremptory a matter for a hand so slight and fair as Lady Burlington's to dare extend itself towards the ark of the covenant.

The "beautiful Ellen" was the very reverse of all this; and if in his soul he despised the gentle lady of Burlington Manor, the soul of the banker sank rebuked under the penetrating eye of Bob Hamilton's widow. He was positively *afraid* of her. She was the Ellen Somerton he had persecuted, the Ellen Somerton he had injured; and she was also the Mrs. Robert Hamilton who might injure and persecute *him* in return. He had bruised her head; he felt that she might still bruise his heel.

For there was the spirit of no ordinary character in Ellen Hamilton; so for the future let us name the fair widow, who, even now, had not completed her twenty-second year. Accomplished in mind as she was beautiful in person, she exhibited a striking instance of the equalizing justice of Providence; for with these rare endowments, she united no favour of fortune. Ellen was the only child of her mother, and *she* was a widow—the widow of a naval officer of modest connexions, who had bequeathed nothing besides his small pension for the maintenance of their child. The rare beauty and still rarer intelligence and self-possession of her daughter served at once to obviate the evils of such a position, and render them harder to be borne. Ellen had high courage; Ellen had a devoted heart; and, from the moment she became aware of the cause of her poor mother's privations, resolved to work for her independence. But *how* is a young girl to achieve "independence" by her own labours? As a seamstress, by which, with assiduous application, she may obtain a shilling a day? As a fritterer of fancy articles, the sale of which (except in novels) is so precarious? As a teacher of music, as a nursery governess? Alas! for these latter vocations recommendations must be procured; and even had they been forthcoming, at sixteen Ellen Somerton was so eminently beautiful, that any duty requiring her transit through the open street was a service of danger as well as of humiliation.

With features delicately chiselled as those of some Grecian muse, she united a clear olive complexion that might have been deemed too brown, but for the darkness of her raven hair and finely-marked eyebrows; but, above all, for the onyx-like hue of those expressive eyes, which, depressed by a sense of early affliction, were habitually fixed upon the ground. But when she *did* condescend to raise them, and fix her looks upon the people with whom she was conversing, what depth of expression! Whether tenderness or thankfulness gleamed from their olive depths, or the sternness of scorn were enhanced by the contemptuous arching of her upper lip, the person who had ever glowed with affection or writhed with shame under the searching glances of Ellen, felt that the influence of that potent sentiment was to abide for evermore!

Had such charms and qualifications existed in combination with birth and fortune, poor Ellen would have been pronounced the most beautiful woman of the day. Her portrait would have figured in exhibitions and annuals; and the likeness of her finely-developed form attracted crowds to the print-shop windows. But in humbler life, such beauty becomes an object of mistrust. Ellen was far too handsome for a governess, far too handsome for a teacher. Again and again, with her mother's sanction, she had attempted to obtain such an employment. Impossible! The cautious or prudish were afraid to embarrass themselves with so beautiful an inmate as Ellen Somerton. One had a brother—one a son—one a husband. Not a woman of them all was to be persuaded!

Time, as it passed on, did but aggravate the evil. But while it perfected the charms, it served also to strengthen the mind and stimulate the courage of the unfortunate girl. The widow and her daughter, too poorly off to reside in the metropolis, had retired to York, where they boarded in the house of a maiden lady, an infirm relative of the deceased Captain Somerton; and there it happened that the accidental perusal of some dramatic memoirs revealing the prodigious fortunes to be acquired by the aid of genius and steadiness on the English stage, fell into the hands of the girl who saw her mother languishing amid the bitter struggles of poverty.

"And why should not I, too, be an actress?" said she, in the earnestness of her heart and consciousness of her genius. "The stage does not necessarily convey degradation! Women have risen to the height of their profession without forfeiting the esteem of society. Why might not I, too, become a Mrs. Siddons—a Miss O'Neill?"

Without consulting her mother, whose susceptibility as a woman, or, rather, as an officer's widow, would, she knew, rebel against such a proposition, Ellen Somerton accordingly set about diligently studying for the stage. Already familiar with the spirit of our great dramatist, she made herself mistress of the leading parts in

Shakspeare's plays; and Juliet became once more exquisitely revived by the rich tones of her youthful voice, and the graceful attitudes of one of the finest of human forms. All she awaited for the accomplishment of her project was the arrival at York of one of the most eminent actresses of one of the winter theatres—a woman equally esteemed for her respectability in private life, and her more than respectability on the boards; who was engaged for a few nights' representation on her way to Edinburgh. To her Ellen had resolved to apply for advice and instruction, looking hopefully forward to the means of independence for herself and competence for the declining years of the kindest of mothers; a consideration sufficient to alleviate all that was painful to her feelings in the projected sacrifice.

It was at this crisis she became accidentally acquainted with Robert Hamilton, who was quartered with his regiment at York. On her way home from the lodgings of Mrs. ——, still excited by the impersonification she had been exhibiting to the astonishment and applause of the practised London actress, who did not hesitate to predict miracles of fame and fortune to the delighted Ellen, she was followed by two officers; nor did her modest demeanour serve as a security against the compliments usually paid under such circumstances to a beautiful girl, emerging, unprotected, from the lodgings of an actress.

Ellen Somerton was sufficiently mistress of herself to express her contemptuous disgust at this ungentlemanly intrusion; and young Hamilton, luckily, of a turn of mind to be only the farther prepossessed by the rebuke of the indignant beauty. With some difficulty, he shortly afterward obtained an introduction to her mother, and was permitted to visit at the house. With greater difficulty still, his devoted attachment found favour in the sight of Ellen, to whose pronounced character, his timid nature and extreme youth were grievous disqualifications. For the rash lover had not yet attained his majority; and nearly a year must elapse before he could obtain such a sanction from his father as might entitle him to demand her hand.

During the lapse of that year, however, the constancy of Robert Hamilton's attentions, and the gentle submission with which he accommodated himself to the exactions of her mother's humble fireside, wrought all the effect he could have desired upon the proud heart of Ellen Somerton. Regardless of the superiority of his prospects or position, she became warmly attached to him; and, when the period approached for the arrival of Colonel Hamilton's answer to his son's application, was almost as nervous and anxious as the devoted lover.

That answer, however, imposed farther suspense. Colonel Hamilton judiciously pronounced that his son was too young to know his own mind—too young to marry; and addressed, at the same time, a private commission to his correspondent, Hamlyn the banker, to inquire especially into the connexions, situation, and conduct of a certain Mrs. Somerton and her daughter, the widow and daughter of a captain in the navy, residing in reduced circumstances at York.

By a singular stroke of ill-fortune, the lady to whom Ellen had applied the preceding year for professional advice, with a full disclosure of her poverty and plans, conceived herself to be rendering a service to her interesting *protégée* by announcing, on her return to town, the existence of a theatrical phœnix in the provinces, who was likely to restore to the theatres all that fashionable vogue admitted to have been withdrawn from the time a first-rate actress was wanting on the boards. The rumours of what are called the "theatrical circles" have usually their echoes in the public press; and the consequence was that, before the project of poor Ellen was developed, even to her mother, the Sunday papers, whenever in want of a paragraph for their theatrical articles, indulged in predictions concerning the unparalleled Juliet—the new Phœnix—the beautiful Miss Ellen Somerton, of York!

What a discovery for Richard Hamlyn! He, who had fixed his heart upon keeping single and heirless the only surviving and sickly son of his wealthy client at Ghazerapore, whose softness of nature was sufficiently revealed in his open-hearted correspondence, instead of making the inquiries demanded of him, did not hesitate to describe the threatened daughter-in-law as neither more nor less than "a country actress!"

"A Country Actress! A thing of rouge and rant—spangles and false ringlets, the *protégée* of the barracks—some artful baggage who had enthralled the feelings of an inexperienced lad of twenty-one!" No wonder that such a picture should rouse even the unready ire of the merciful colonel. Now onder the mere idea of such a daughter should produce the angry prohibition, nay, the threatened malediction of old John Hamilton. For the first time in his life, he expressed himself bitterly and unfairly in his letter of refusal to his son!

Long before that letter reached England, the interference of Robert Hamilton had obtained a public contradiction of the announcement of the appearance of the new Juliet. But the mischief was done. After nearly two years of suspense patiently endured by all parties, after the heroical submission of that humble domestic circle, came this cruelty, this insult, this sentence of death!

For a sentence of death it proved to more than one of the parties interested in Colonel Hamilton's decision. The high-minded mother, from whom Ellen and her plighted lover had managed to conceal the reports in question, ignorant till that moment of a project frustrated by the altered prospects of the family, a project which her own greater experience of the world would have forbidden her to sanction, sank under the influence of Colonel Hamilton's humiliating insinuations. Had poor Ellen *really* become an actress, the power of genius, the meed of public approbation, would, perhaps, have sanctified the calling in the eyes of her mother. But the stigma was conveyed without its extenuation. The bane had no assuaging antidote. Ellen, her pure, virtuous, gifted, dutiful, spotless Ellen, was branded as the "*protégée* of the barracks;" and the poor woman, long harassed by anxiety, poverty, and care, laid her head on the pillow of sickness after perusing that bitter letter, and never raised it again. Her next resting-place was the grave.

By the indiscreet frankness of Colonel Hamilton, the source of his injurious information had been suffered to transpire in his letter to his son; and the remonstrances addressed to Richard Hamlyn by the aggrieved orphan were such as might be supposed to flow from the pen of a woman injured in the dearest points of her sex's sensibilities. Abstaining from all bitterness, all invective, she calmly laid before him the sufferings of her mother's life, the fortitude of her

mother's character, the wretchedness of her mother's end; and then bade him search his heart for vindication of the murder he had committed.

Every compensation was offered by Robert Hamilton in his power to bestow. Having in the interim attained his majority, he was eager to make the calumniated orphan his wife, and share with her the liberal allowance made him by his father. But this was firmly refused by the high-minded girl. She would not force her way into the family by which she had been so ignominiously rejected.

She wrote, however, to Colonel Hamilton. In defence of her own and her poor mother's character, she laid before him an explicit account of the circumstances of her unhappy fortunes; and even obtained an attestation from the clergyman who had officiated at her mother's deathbed, and assisted them for the last fifteen years in their diligent observance of the duties of the Protestant communion. The pious man who had prepared her for confirmation, and bestowed on Mrs. Somerton the last consolations of religion, warmly and indignantly resented the accusations of the banker; declaring his young charge to be not only irreproachable as one of his own children, but exemplary in all the relations of life.

Till the answer to this communication should arrive, Ellen steadily declined even a friendly intercourse with Robert Hamilton. Maintaining herself by the labours of her needle, in addition to the scanty pension allotted to the sailor's orphan, she persevered patiently and courageously in her determination. And verily she had her reward; for when, at length, the answer of Colonel Hamilton arrived from Ghazerapore, it was that of a "father who pitieth his own children." It conveyed happiness, comfort, independence, wealth; it conveyed all she could desire save what was gone forever—the tender mother she had lost—the broken constitution of her affianced husband.

The happiness of the young couple was, however, for a time sufficing. The good pastor, who had stood the friend of poor Ellen in her adversity, gave her away; and Robert, who, from the delicacy of his health, had been forced to quit the army, proposed that they should pass their first winter in Italy.

As yet unaware of the fatal presentiments by which the proposition was suggested, the happy bride prepared herself to enjoy, beyond all her early dreams of earthly enjoyment, the beauty of the loveliest country under the sun, hand in hand with the dearest and most devoted of human beings; and, already surrounded by the luxurious comfort secured by the liberality of the good colonel, they were preparing for immediate departure, when Robert Hamilton, after due appeal to her indulgence, hazarded an earnest petition.

On the strength of the remonstrances forwarded to England by Colonel Hamilton, the repentant banker, in despair either at the result of his rash slander, or at having risked the displeasure of his valued client, had thrown himself without reserve on the forbearance of the young couple; offered the most plausible explanations of his error, and appealed so forcibly to the feelings of Robert as his father's friend, and the kindly fosterer of his boyhood, that young Hamilton, secretly conscious of his approaching end, and desirous to exercise the last act in his power of Christian forbearance, not only forgave his enemy, but obtained from the reluctant Ellen her consent to pass a few days, preparatory to leaving England forever, with the banker's family at Dean Park.

Once there, Richard Hamlyn spared no humbleness of adulation to obtain forgiveness of his fault. Already, he had despatched to Ghazerapore an account of his promptitude of atonement; and it must be admitted that he completed his sacrifice of expiation by rendering every word he addressed to Mrs. Robert Hamilton, while under his roof, an effort of self-abasement.

But while Ellen recognised with admiration the gentle, self-controlling virtues of the banker's wife, and, in deference to these, suppressed all betrayal of hatred and disgust towards the husband, Richard Hamlyn was painfully conscious that he had effected nothing towards the obliteration of the uncharitable feelings his malice had created. He saw that in Ellen Hamilton he had an enemy for life; that between him and her, as regarded the favour of her father-in-law, there would be perpetual warfare; and when, within a year from his marriage, tidings reached England from Naples of the untimely death of the young husband, the banker foresaw that his grasp upon the coveted inheritance of his friend the nabob, though strengthened by the event, might still be baffled by the influence of the beautiful widow.

Her apparent indifference to pecuniary advantage afforded his sole consolation. Of Colonel Hamilton's arrival in England, his daughter-in-law, so far from hastening to profit by the offers of a home he instantly vouchsafed her, kept aloof; as if unconscious or careless of her power to become the heiress of three hundred and forty-two thousand pounds!

On a sudden, however, after the lapse of more than a year, her return to England was announced; announced, too, at a moment when her presence portended peculiar defeat to the plottings of the banker. Having located himself in peace and quietness for the remainder of his days, the colonel, as became his advanced age, began to talk of making his will. His Will! a will disposing of nearly three hundred and fifty thousand pounds; a sum involving the happiness, credit, honour, solvency of Hamlyn and Co.!

In the present crisis of his affairs, two things appeared essential to accomplish the defeated projects of Richard Hamlyn's care-worn life: first, that one of his family should be ready to succeed him in his business, and become the depositary of its mysteries and conservator of its fortunes; and, secondly, that the property of Colonel Hamilton should be secured to him as head of the firm. If, indeed, his hopes of direct inheritance were to be frustrated by the ill-omened arrival of the widow, her marriage with his son Walter seemed to present the sole alternative. But what was to be hoped, if all her former aversion to the Hamlyn family had been recently renewed by a sudden intimacy with Lady Burlington, to whom he knew himself to be an object of suspicion and dislike?

But worse than all—far, far worse, and more perplexing than all—was the surmise recently suggested by Colonel Hamilton, that, during Henry's visit to Italy, his son might have become intimate with this dangerous pair, and unconsciously imbibed their sentiments of mistrust. Was not this a sufficient explanation of the sudden aversion conceived by Harry for the career he had been previously satisfied to em-

brace? How otherwise, indeed, could he account for the precipitate change of sentiments announced to him by his wife on the part of the refractory young man, in his recent visit to Dean Park; the cause of so much conjugal irritation, as well as the origin of his singular self-betrayal to his favourite son?

Richard Hamlyn was, as the experienced reader has long ago discovered, a systematic dissembler. He was one of those who not only "let not their right hand know what their left doeth," but was in league with his left hand to deceive and defraud his right. His whole life was a system of semblance—of careful and consistent deceit. For his interests' sake, having once launched upon the sea of imposture, he was unable to recede from acts of dissimulation towards his customers and mercantile associates. But the deception in which he persevered for the gratification of his personal feelings, was the attitude he assumed towards his family. The only thing he cared for in public life was to be cited as Hamlyn the great banker—son of Hamlyn the great banker—head of one of the most substantial firms in the city. The only thing he desired in private, was to appear before his sons as the most upright and honourable of the human race—a conscientious man of business—a disinterested politician—a virtuous citizen—a benevolent Christian—a great and good man. He cared as much for *this* as others more deeply imbued with a sense of moral responsibility—others with a more deep-felt awe of the terrors of eternal punishment—care for the exercise of those very virtues of which *he* ambitioned the pretence.

Some excuse may be offered for this infatuation. There is an exquisite charm in filial tenderness, to which many a nature inaccessible to every other species of human affection is open at every pore. The love of a young child for its parents—the trustful, uninquiring, pious love that can neither imagine a fault nor resent an injustice—approaches nearest to the expansion of adoration we render to the Supreme Being; and to those who have suffered under the aspersions of the world, or been wounded by the scorn of their fellow-creatures, this unwonted tenderness conveys a balm, devised, as if by the express mercy of GOD, for the healing of their souls. While others mistrust, the confiding child has faith as in the stability of Heaven. While others disdain, the grateful child preserves its attitude of kneeling submission. The criminal, who goes to his death with the certainty that the faith of his children in his innocence is unshaken, loses half the anguish of the gallows.

By the same rule, the apprehension of a conscious falterer in the path of rectitude that rumours of his errors will reach the ears of his children—that *their* suspicions, like those of the world, will be awakened; that the eye in which he has been accustomed to read the fulness of love and faith will become averted like the rest; that the fond pressure of the hand will be qualified, the kiss imbittered, the warm, warm, trusting, heart-felt, soul-felt, filial embrace delayed—is, of all the punishments of human frailty, the hardest to be borne.

Such was the apprehension which caused Richard Hamlyn to pace with perturbed steps the noble proportions of his handsome drawing-room, shuffle his unexamined papers together, replace them peevishly in his secretaire, and retreat to his anxious pillow with even a heavier pressure than usual upon his heart.

Long as had been his career of worldly anxiety, acute as was on many occasions the agony of his fears, he began to feel that the shame of a public bankruptcy were trivial compared with having to stand in presence of his gentlemanly sons, as one whose honour and honesty have given way amid the struggles which only serve to strengthen the courage and steadfastness of genuine worth.

No rest that night for the throbbing head of Hamlyn the banker!

CHAPTER XIII.

"As great and exalted spirits undertake the pursuit of hazardous actions for the good of others, gratifying at the same time their own passion for glory, so do worthy minds in the domestic way of life, undervaluing the ordinary gratifications of wealth, exercise the great civil virtue of self-denial for the comfort of others. Such natures one may call the stores of Providence; for they are actuated by a secret celestial influence."—ADDISON.

THOUGH Colonel Hamilton was considerably vexed by the thwarting of his projects in Henry Hamlyn's favour through his mysterious absence from Cambridge and London, the sanguine tone of the old gentleman's mind was such as to prevent all pondering over his vexations. In the lesser as in the great events of life, his general principle, that "whatever is, is right," reconciled him to his infructuous journey of three hundred miles.

"No doubt," said he, as he sat discussing an oyster-omelet for breakfast with the good vicar, the following morning, "no doubt the stupid gyp, or your friend, the learned Pundit of a tutor, made a mistake. 'Twas to Dean Park, not to Lon'on, the boy was going. However, here we are; and though we've been misled a bit in our calculations, no need to make bad worse by not taking 'the goods the gods provide us,' and enjoying ourselves when we're in the way of enjoyment."

Dr. Markham, already somewhat discountenanced by the brilliancy and bustle of St. James's-street, felt almost alarmed at the growing spirits of the joyous veteran. But there was no help for it, during their sojourn in the metropolis, but to follow the guidance of his merry leader.

"By George! you shall come with me after breakfast, doctor, and visit the museum of our club," cried he. "Then, after we've skimmed the morning papers, we'll have a peep into the Practical Science concern, and you can have your very long face daguerreotyped, to take back to your good little wife. After that, we'll look in at Hatchard's, and see what they've got new on the counter; and, by-the-way, those patent ventilators that the Sir Pompous, at Lord Vernon's, was prosing about, and which I thought would be such an improvement for the Ovington workhouse—they're sold somewhere in the Strand, I think? The first hackney-coachman 'll show us the way; for in Lon'on, wisdom cries aloud in the streets. So on with your great-coat, my dear doctor, and let's be stirring."

At that moment the Colonel was unusually in conceit with "Lon'on," for it was no longer the dreary Lon'on of Portland Place or Cavendish Square. He was now in the centre of stir, bustle, movement—trade, throbbing with all its arteries—pleasure, giggling with all her coquetries. Such a "Lon'on" as St. James's-street

presented at that moment was, for a time, exciting enough.

"There must surely be something unusual going on this morning?" said Dr. Markham, when, having turned the angle of St. James's-street, Pall Mall lay before them, enlivened by its bustle of intermingling palaces and exhibition-rooms, auctions and public offices, with all the motley array of lounging guardsmen and rigid sentries; to say nothing of the luxury of wealth or wealth of luxury in the shop-windows, gorgeous jewels, glittering clocks, shapely china, brilliant glass, noble engravings and costly furniture, besides a rainbow variegation of silk, satin, and brocade. The eyes of the rustics were almost dazzled as they mingled with the throng of well-dressed people hurrying joyously along the pavement on either side.

"Don't talk so confoundedly like a country put!" cried the colonel, in reply. "You remind me of the Yorkshireman in the story, who stood aside all day long in the Strand to let the crowd go by. Recollect you're not on Ovington causeway, man, and pluck up your spirits."

His sense of the superior rusticity of the vicar inspired him, in short, with all the sauciness of a practised cockney. Nevertheless, by the time they reached the bottom of Waterloo Place, the colonel himself was struck by the unusual hurry of the streets.

"Here's what the Lon'oners have the prigism to call their modern Athens!" said he, pointing out the Carlton quarter to the admiration of the vicar, who stood transfixed and wondering, much as the colonel himself had done in the centre of the Trinity quadrangle the preceding day. "All pasteboard and stucco! all sham and show! though an improvement, certainly, on the old brick walls, pierced with windows, we used to call streets! These clubs, these joint stock society-companies, as I call 'em, are a mighty addition, aren't they, to the splendours of the town? They gave the example of improvement, I'm told, in domestic architecture. 'Twas only by force of public subscription people found out they could afford to have brackets to their windows, and columns to their doors. Some day or other, let's hope the Carlton will be rich enough to build itself a marble palace, like the one they tell of at Petersburg, or t'other that's stopped short at its second story, in the tarnation grand city of Washington. The Reform Club's a fine thing, if t'were not for its little pig-eyed windows, though even those, the judges tell me, are according to book. Is anything out of the way going on this morning, pray?" demanded the colonel, in his turn, suddenly addressing a waiter, standing on the steps of the United Service Club, to whom he was known.

"Nothing, sir, that I'm aware of, besides the meeting of Parliament," replied the man, taking his hands out of his pockets in deference to the gray hairs and soldierly demeanour of the veteran, who, heedless of his respect or disrespect, and exclaiming, "Gad, my dear doctor, what a couple of famous old blockheads we are to have forgotten that the eighteenth was the meeting of Parliament!" pushed onward with the unresisting vicar towards the more densely-crowded neighbourhood of Charing Cross. The bells of St. Martin's Church were ringing merrily, its flag was hoisted, a troop of life-guardsmen was arriving, and a detachment of police had already arrived to regulate the movements of the throng; while at the top of Cockspur-street, inspectors were stationed to decide on the exhibition of tickets, what aristocratic equipages were to pass down Whitehall, to deposite their inmates at the door of the House of Lords, and what carriages to be sent sneaking round to Westminster, by the Strand and Waterloo Bridge.

"We're in luck, my dear Markham! we're in famous luck!" exclaimed the colonel, now more than ever satisfied that, notwithstanding his disappointment about Harry, all was for the best. "A fine story you'll have to tell when you get back to the Vicarage, that we saw the queen, and court, and ministers, to say nothing of the great lords and pretty ladies, and all without being a pinch of snuff the worse for it, or putting ourselves a step out of the way."

Brilliant equipages, crowded with officers in uniform, or lovely women in full array of feathers and diamonds, were in fact every moment glancing past, on their way to the House of Lords; while the windows and balconies of the houses in Whitehall and Parliament-street were thronged with well-dressed spectators, on the look-out for the royal procession. Though the gorgeous Life Guards were active in keeping the streets, it was difficult to restrain within due bounds the eager crowds pushing their way towards Westminster, in the hopes of securing a view of the annual show.

"Let us station ourselves hereabout," said the colonel, immediately after passing the Horse Guards; "from hence we shall have a capital view of the pageant."

But for the mere pageant the good vicar avowed little interest.

"A state coach," said he, "is, after all, but a piece of gilt gingerbread; a cumbrous, tawdry affair, fit only to figure as a frontispiece to a child's story-book. But I own I rejoice in the opportunity of obtaining a glimpse of the queen."

"What the deuse! you don't mean to say that you've never seen her?" cried the colonel, in delighted surprise.

"This is my first visit to London these seven years."

"Then, by George! I'd have travelled three times three hundred miles, and welcome, to afford you the pleasure," added the colonel. "I hope I've been a loyal man all my life, and prayed heartily for those that were put in authority over me. I was thankful to King George, in whose time the French were so preciously beaten; and thankful to King William, for granting us the blessing of Reform. But I never understood the real thrill and glow of loyalty to my sovereign, doctor, till I found myself in the presence of that fair young creatur', and felt that I, a grayhaired man, shrunk to nothing in her presence. Blessings be upon her, say I, doctor; blessings be upon her! Till she was married, I felt somehow as though 'twere a daughter of my own; and I'll be bound, if they'd own it, half the pottering old blockheads in England experienced the same! And now she's a wife and mother, I don't love her the less, because I respect her the more! Gad! I'm gladder than I can say, doctor, that you'll be treated with a look at the queen."

At that moment the discharge of the Park guns announced the departure of the royal *cortège* from the palace, and the bells of St. Margaret's chimed out a merry peal. Again a few minutes, and the cheers of the populace in the Park became audible in the distance; gradually

augmenting, till vehement shouts and loud huzzas, overpowering the trampling of the horses that formed the royal escort, announced that her majesty was at hand, on her way to open in person the session of Parliament so momentous to the welfare of the realm.

Unaccustomed to the throng of cities, Dr. Markman felt almost dizzy under the pressure of that tumultuous assemblage; the sea of faces beating up against him, the roar, as of its surges, deafening his ears. His feelings were overpowered. While Hamilton was elated with a degree of joy, rivalling almost that of the boys clambering upon the lamp-posts to command a view of the procession, the vicar felt that he had scarcely voice to shout among the rest, "Long live the queen!"

Already uproarious cries to that effect resounded on all sides. Already the leaders of the state-horses, with their gorgeous housings of crimson, were in sight, emerging from the gateway of the Horse Guards—when Colonel Hamilton was suddenly startled by an exclamation from his companion of, "As I live, there is Henry Hamlyn!"

"Where? where?" cried the colonel, instantly preparing to join him, though the dense pressure of the crowd must have prevented him from stirring an inch.

"In yonder carriage; the shabby yellow chariot stationed on the opposite side of the gateway!" said Dr. Markham, pointing to one in a knot of carriages which, as usual on such occasions, had straggled to the scene of action through the oversight of the police, either at Charing Cross or Westminster; and, though buffeted by inspectors and reviled by the officer on duty, contrived to stand their ground. The one pointed out by Dr. Markham appeared to have become unintentionally hemmed in; for the young man whom he asserted to be Henry Hamlyn was at that moment engaged in altercation with the police, entreating an order to pass, and escape from the file.

"As if they'd allow e'er a carriage to move, just as the percession is going by!" was the observation of several persons in Colonel Hamilton's neighbourhood, who had noticed the young man's appeal. "There the carriage must stick till the queen has reached the Parliament House, and no mistake!"

Secure at last of finding his young friend, the colonel allowed his whole attention to be engrossed by the pageant; nor did the deafening cries that now rent the air leave him much leisure for reflection. Among the hearts throbbing around him at that moment with the excitement of the scene, no two, perhaps, were more fervently inspired by genuine warmth of loyalty, than Colonel Hamilton and the worthy doctor.

"And now," cried the former, the moment the trampling escort of Life Guards, closing the procession, had passed onward towards Whitehall—"and now for this scapegrace, Master Harry!"

But the group of carriages, again visible in consequence of the disappearance of the intervening objects, had shifted its juxtaposition. A hackney-coach now occupied the station taken up before by the yellow carriage; and a butterman's cart was the next vehicle in sight. Carriages there were in abundance: green, chocolate-coloured, crimson, blue, and yellow—but not *the* yellow—not the shabby-genteel equipage containing the object of his search.

"By George! I do believe the fellow's again escaped me!" cried Colonel Hamilton, in a pet.

"I fear, indeed, that we have lost sight of him," replied the vicar, obeying the impulsion of his companion, and following the stream of idlers moving towards Cockspur-street. "We are scarcely likely to come up again with the yellow carriage!"

"Who the deuse was the scapegrace with?" resumed Colonel Hamilton. "Did you notice, doctor, who were his companions?"

"Two ladies in deep mourning."

"What! a lady with a remarkably fine cast of countenance, in a black velvet bonnet?" persisted the colonel.

"Precisely."

"I noticed *her* as the carriage passed us to take up its position, but without at all suspecting that the young fellow in her company was Hamlyn's son. At that time I might almost have laid my hand upon his coat-sleeve! By George! it is too provoking."

To give a new turn to the colonel's ideas, Dr. Markham proposed that they should now proceed to Mivart's, to inquire for Mrs. Robert Hamilton. But the colonel had already despatched Johnston thither on a similar errand, who brought back the unsatisfactory answer that no lady of that name was either *there*, or expected.

Still, there was no occasion for despondency. The two far from uncongenial companions contrived to spend the morning in a succession of interesting visits and surveys; and, as Dr. Markham was desirous of passing the remainder of the day with a sister of his wife, settled in the neighbourhood of Russell Square, to whom he had already intimated his arrival in town, Colonel Hamilton dined at his club, and had the satisfaction to perceive that its ultra-Oriental *cuisine* was unequal to the production of a prawn-currie, rivalling that of Goody Johnston!

"See here, my dear doctor—I entreat of you just look at my luck!" cried he, when Dr. Markham made his appearance at the breakfast-table the following morning. "Cast your eyes upon this deuse of a Morning Post!"

"News of Mr. Henry Hamlyn?" demanded the vicar, taking the paper into his hand, and perceiving that the finger of the colonel pointed to the list of "FASHIONABLE CHANGES."

"Worse a thousand times—of my daughter-in-law!"

And thus enlightened, the doctor had no difficulty in discovering an announcement among the "Departures" of "Mrs. Robert Hamilton from Coulson's Hotel, to the seat of Colonel Hamilton in Warwickshire."

"Vexatious indeed!" cried the vicar, "that you, who so seldom leave home, should have been absent on her arrival at the Manor!"

"She'll think, maybe, I did it o' purpose, poor soul! She'll fancy me wanting in respect. I wouldn't have it happen for the world! As if I hadn't enough to answer already towards her! Poor Ellen!"

"We may reach Burlington Manor by dinner time, if we start by the first train!" said the doctor, a *leetle* disappointed at this precipitate departure from London.

"Of course! The moment I read this cursed paragraph, I told Johnston to pack up. I ventured it without consulting you, my dear doctor, knowing how plaguy glad you'd be to get out of this smoky metropolis, and back to your flock.

We shall be off in an hour or two. Still, 'tisn't like being on the spot with open arms to welcome the poor girl to her strange home. Ten to one, she wrote to announce her arrival to me, and the letter miscarried! One's never sure of foreign letters! Poor Ellen! 'tis rather hard upon her, though harder still upon *me!*"

And Dr. Markham readily discerned, by the flutter of the old gentleman's spirits, how greatly he was excited by the anticipation of this meeting with the widow of his last remaining son.

Throughout their journey down, which was chiefly performed on the railroad, instead of being cheerful and chatty as usual, he was almost silent. His thoughts were thoroughly preoccupied. He was back again at Ghazerapore, receiving his son's first letter announcing that disastrous attachment. He was listening to the mild remonstrances and intercessions of his wife. He was alone with Mary, and Mary with him. Dusky figures in Oriental garbs were loitering in the distance. Balmy smells of tropical plants were in the air. He was again an exile, again a husband, again a father; and a happy and contented exile, because a father and a husband. And, lo! as all these scenes and interests passed before his mind's eye, heavy sighs burst unconsciously from his bosom; so deeply was the old man moved by a thousand tender associations of affection and remorse connected with the name of Ellen Somerton.

"I'll make her happy yet! By George! she shall be happy *yet!*" was his concluding reflection. "So long as Mrs. Hamlyn and dear Lydia remain at Dean, she'll find no occasion for moping at the Manor; and a'ter'ard, we may still manage well enough. At all events, she'll have her own way; and, for nine women in ten, that's almost happiness enough. But though I'd give my little finger to know what brought about her intimacy with Harry Hamlyn, so as to correspond with him (as I saw at Cambridge by her own handwriting), I'll not force myself upon her confidence. I shall soon see whether she intends to be a heart in heart daughter and a dear Ellen to me, or whether there's a spice of rancour at the bottom of her heart that will still keep her Mrs. Robert Hamilton."

As usually the case with travellers in an inordinate hurry, delay occurred. In consequence of an accident to the preceding train, they were kept three hours at the Weedon station, when the impatience of the poor colonel was at its highest; and as, on arriving at Rugby, there were still twelve miles to be accomplished across the country, they did not reach the outskirts of Ovington till the village-clock was striking ten. All was still. A few straggling lights were alone perceptible in the cottages; and so tardy were the unprepared inmates of the vicarage in answering the gate-bell rousingly rung by the postboy, that, in pity to the impatience of his companion, Dr. Markham insisted on getting out to await the coming of his servant, while the colonel proceeded post-haste to the Manor.

After the usual delay at the park-lodge of an early to bed and early to rise gatekeeper, and the ordinary exclamations of wonder on the part of Goody Johnston, when at length the colonel obtained admittance into his own house, she hastened to acquaint her master that Mrs. Robert had arrived that morning, and already, worn by the fatigues of her journey, had retired for the night.

"Plague take it! I'd have given anything for a sight of her afore I slept!" cried the old man. "But no matter! The poor soul's safe under my roof at last! Better late than never! I must wait till morning. I hope you made her feel herself completely at home?" cried he, suddenly addressing his housekeeper.

"I don't know why you should suppose me wanting in respect, colonel, to poor dear Master Robert's widow," replied Mrs. Johnston, with some indignation; and as she toddled out of the room to issue orders for tea and supper for the belated traveller, her master perceived that she had arrayed herself in her utmost pomp of silk and laces, to do honour to their guest. The old lady felt, perhaps, that, Master Robert's lamented mother being in her grave, it became *her* duty to exercise the motherly feelings of her late mistress in behalf of the stranger.

"Perhaps 'tis as well, poor thing, she should be abed and asleep!" mused Colonel Hamilton, as he sat down to tea, for, in spite of this self-consoling ejaculation, his disappointment had deprived him of all appetite for cold fowl and partridge-pie. And he patted Pincher anew upon his grizzly head, and master and dog were looking wistfully into the fire—as if both were thinking of Ghazerapore, and of how fondly poor Mary would have delighted in welcoming her poor daughter-in-law under her roof—when the drawing-room door was gently opened, and in glided a slender figure in a white dressing-gown, who advanced towards the colonel neither with the impetuosity of a heroine prepared to throw herself into his arms, nor with the hesitation of a person uncertain of her reception. She approached, however, with extended hands, as if conscious of her right to be there, and to welcome *him*, as the last comer, to their common home.

"I *could* not wait till to-morrow morning!" said she, after being folded to the old man's heart, with a degree of fervour that brought tears into her fine eyes—not, however, upon her cheeks, for Ellen was a person too accustomed to subdue her emotions, to indulge, as she felt inclined, in the luxury of a flood of tears; "I was *so* disappointed, sir, at not finding you this morning (having stupidly travelled by night for the purpose of surprising you), that I retired to bed earlier than usual to sleep off my ill-humour. I have only had time, as you perceive, to throw off my nightcap. I know you will forgive me for not having waited to dress!" said she, in broken sentences, which had all the grace of coming warm from the heart.

As soon as his own eyes were clear enough from tears, the old man drew back to contemplate the daughter-in-law whose fatal beauty had been the cause of so much family trouble; and instantly admitted to himself that in this utter dishabille, with her white gown folded loosely round her, and her black hair fastened in perfect simplicity round her head by a single comb, Ellen had the air of a duchess.

"Poor Bob was right," said he, in the aching depths of his heart. "By George! she's the most beautiful creatur' on the face o' the earth!"

These sentiments of genuine admiration did not diminish when, while drinking his tea, he sat watching the ever-varying expression of her fine countenance as, in answer to his hurried inquiries, she described her arrival in town

by an Antwerp steamboat, escorted by her two servants, the day before, after pursuing her way from Switzerland by the Rhine.

"I am a perverse creature, or, rather, an obstinate one, as you will soon find, dear sir, to your cost," said she, already placed perfectly at her ease by the blunt cordiality of her father-in-law; "and having always made up my mind to return through Germany to England, I persevered in my intentions, though the Rhine presented nothing to my admiration but blocks of ice and leafless forests."

Such was her mode of evading the avowal that she had been unwilling to pursue, on her homeward course, the same route she had taken to Italy, three years before, in company with her unfortunate husband.

"And so, my dear Ellen, you and I, who have neither of us any more call to Lon'on than though we were foreigners, were actually in town at the same moment without a guess at it!" cried he, in his turn. And as he uttered the words, some peculiar turn of expression in the beautiful face on which his eyes were riveted suddenly recalled to mind a similar countenance on which they had lately rested; *so* lately, that he felt puzzled, as if by the realization of a recent dream.

At length, the truth darted into his mind. It certainly *was* his own Ellen he had seen in the carriage at the Horse Guards! The contrast between her white wrapper and the mourning weeds in which she was then attired had alone prevented the recognition from being immediate.

He was about to burst into an exclamation announcing their curious and unsuspected encounter, when, suddenly reverting to the letter he had discovered at Cambridge on the desk of Henry Hamlyn, and the presence of his young friend in the carriage he firmly believed to have contained his lovely guest, he conquered his natural impulse of frankness, and forbore.

"I won't *force* myself on their confidence," was his secret determination. "I won't force myself on their confidence. Neither of 'em know me yet enough to be aware whether I'm trustworthy. If, at the end of a week or so, she don't speak out, 'twill be time enough to inquire why she should make a mystery of her acquaintance with Harry Hamlyn."

It was a long time since the colonel had retired to his pillow so happy or so comforted with the sense of not being *quite* alone in the world, as he felt that night, under the certainty that his son's widow was enjoying a comfortable night's rest in the chints-room at the end of the corridor.

Next morning the good old gentleman's waking was a still happier sensation. To come down to breakfast with the expectation of having that pure, open forehead on which to imprint a parental kiss of benediction, was a comfort indeed to the kindly heart so long debarred the solace of female companionship; and as he contemplated her again from head to foot, he could not help admitting, with mingled pain and pleasure, how proud poor Mary would have been of such a daughter-in-law.

It was a happy morning for them both. The sun was civil enough to shine as brightly on their walk after breakfast as it had done on the Whitehall pageant; and the colonel felt that he had seldom had a companion more to his taste than when Ellen leaned upon his arm to visit the Thibet goats, and accompany him, escorted by Pincher and Carlo, to his usual haunts in the park and poultry-yard, where two or three favourite deer came ambling forward from the herd to be fed by his hand, while the peacocks, after creeping to his feet, set up their tails, in vainglorious rivalship, to attract his attention.

"I'm fond of dumb animals—fond of 'em as a child!" said the colonel, as he led her off towards the stables, to exhibit his stud, unaware how purely childlike were *all* his tastes and affections. "I mustn't plague you, though, with showing off my favourites. Fond of riding, eh! Ellen? Anything of a horsewoman? Then, by George! you shall have the most perfect lady's horse in the county. There's a half-bred Arabian I heard of at Leamington, out of the Ormeau stud, which I was inquiring about for my little Lydia's birthday. 'Twas too tall for her; but you shall have it afore we're a week older. I'm afraid you must put up with the old snobby's company by way of escort, my dear; for the only beau we've got hereabout, young Hamlyn, has just started for Melton Mowbray."

As this allusion had no ulterior motive (what allusion of the colonel's ever had?), he was startled by the sudden suffusion of Mrs. Hamilton's cheeks, as he just then confronted her for a moment in opening the door of his fine, airy, roomy, thirty-stall stable, one of the many surviving evidences of poor Sir Roger Burlington's extravagance. He had not conceived it possible that a woman naturally devoid of colour could blush so deep a scarlet.

From the stable they proceeded to the conservatories; and, had the pragmatical Anderson still presided over their arrangements, he would have been indignant at the recklessness with which Colonel Hamilton tore down the fairest blossoms, and stripped the air-plants of every semblance of bloom, the moment his daughter-in-law expressed a desire for a nearer view of their curious organization. All the devastations he had ever committed to please Miss Hamlyn were nothing compared with the result of the quarter of an hour spent by Ellen in the Burlington Conservatory.

"I wish to goodness Almighty you'd seen it in summer time, with the fountains playing and the birds singing!" said he. "But 'twas your own fault, Ellen. Why not come home at once, when you heard the old man had a roof over his head, and was all alone under it? We've lost a many pleasant months together, my dear girl; but we've a many, I trust, in store for us yet! I'm glad you're fond o' flowers, Ellen! 'Tis a nat'ral womanly liking; accustoms ladies to out o' door pleasures, and makes 'em healthy, and happy, and wise. Lydia and her mother are fond o' flowers; and if it hadn't been for *them*, last summer, my roses might as well have been blooming at Ghazerapore. You'll love Lydia and her mother, Ellen! Lydia must have been a mere child when you were at Dean afore? She's now a fine, promising young creature. You mustn't take a prejudice against Lydia 'cause she's my friend Hamlyn's daughter."

"Why should you suppose me likely to be unfavourably influenced against a daughter of Mr. Hamlyn?" inquired Mrs. Hamilton, in a graver tone than she had yet assumed towards her father-in-law.

"'Cause you're a woman, my dear! a good one and a charming, I'm fain to believe; but still, a woman; and I never saw the petticoat yet, from a Begum down to a cobbler's wife, that didn't hide a heart having a little ugly corner for the resentment of injuries. There's no-

thing a woman understands so little, I take it, as how to forgive."

Spontaneously, poor Ellen pressed the arm on which she was leaning, in token that there were *some* offences she had fully forgiven.

"Nay, on the whole, my dear," resumed the colonel, "I'm not sure that I like you the less for the frown I saw contract your brows last night, when I accidentally stumbled on the name of Richard Hamlyn; 'cause so long as you vent any little anger you may still feel upon *him*, I've the better chance of being let off easy. The banker shall be my whipping-boy, if you please, and you may flog away to your heart's content. Only I claim exemption for the banker's wife."

"You cannot claim it more warmly than I am disposed to grant it," said Ellen, frankly. "For *her*, my short visit to Dean impressed me with sincere liking and respect."

"You'll walk over with me, then, to see her, after breakfast to-morrow? if, as I suppose, they arrive from Rotherwood Castle to-night."

Mrs. Hamilton made no reply; and the colonel, fancying his voice had been drowned just then by the click of the swing-gate of Ovington Vicarage, which they were entering, reiterated his question.

"It will be scarcely according to etiquette for me to call on Mrs. Hamlyn first," said she. "I had better wait, perhaps, for her visit."

"Well! I never should have fancied you the sort of a girl to stand on such idle ceremony!" cried he. "I thought you'd too much sense and too much feeling. You don't know how I loved you, my dear, for tumbling out o' bed in your dressing-gown and slippers last night, to make my acquaintance."

"Mrs. Hamlyn is not a connexion," replied Ellen, somewhat embarrassed. "Mrs. Hamlyn has not my poor Robert's blood in her veins."

"Oh! if it is but *that!*" retorted the colonel, pressing her arm in his turn. "Only as you made no objection to accompany me here, to visit good Mrs. Markham, who's no more related to us than t'other—"

"The wife of the clergyman of the parish must always be the first personage in it," observed Ellen, calmly, "and as such, entitled to the utmost deference."

"And Mrs. Hamlyn—" the colonel was beginning. But at that moment they were received on the doorsteps by Dr. Markham, who cordially conducted the beautiful stranger to be introduced to his wife. A cheerful conversation ensued, which satisfied the Markhams of the important addition achieved by their little circle. Mrs. Hamilton was open, kind, intelligent; and when (according to Vicarage-custom whenever the colonel paid them a visit) the children made their appearance, and Ellen took the youngest into her arms and made much of it, so lovely did she look with the crimson cheek of little Kitty nestling against her own, that tears arose, for the tenth time that day, in the eyes of the poor colonel.

"Ah! if he'd only left a child!" murmured the old man to himself, as he turned towards the window to conceal the emotion—"if he'd only left a child! Poor Bob! 'twas all Hamlyn's doing. He meant no harm, I dare say, but 'twas all Hamlyn's doing! Well! God's will be done! 'Tis something to be able to press the hand of his widow."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Those cherish'd torments of our lives,
The best of daughters and of wives."—VANE.

INEXPRESSIBLE was the vexation of Richard Hamlyn at finding, on his arrival at home to a late dinner from the house, a couple of days after the meeting of Parliament, that his wife and daughter were waiting for him in the drawing-room. Like Lord Vernon, he felt indignant at being too punctually obeyed; for it was only because, on the colonel's sudden visit to town, he had written to desire they would not proceed from Rotherwood to Dean Park, but at once to Cavendish Square, that his family had accelerated their departure to London for the season. Mrs. Hamlyn's eager inquiry of, "Where is Colonel Hamilton, when is his daughter-in-law expected?" sufficiently proved that her husband's supplementary letters of instruction had crossed her on the road.

Now they *were* come, however, leaving the artful Mrs. Hamilton to establish herself fully and firmly in the good graces of her soft-hearted father-in-law, all that remained was to make the best of it. The London season had already begun, for that middle-class order of parliamentary men whose pleasures consist in their Wednesday and Saturday dinners, rather than in balls and parties. Ministerial cards were out—a levée and drawing-room announced—the Opera about to open. Mr. Hamlyn felt that he had no good reason to assign to his favourite "world" for prolonging the sojourn of his family at Dean Park.

A London banker, having a handsome establishment in town, is held bound to reassemble his domesticities about him as soon as may be after the meeting of Parliament. It would "look odd" were his usual dinner-parties suspended. It would "look odd" were his wife to be without an opera-box during the season of his daughter's *début*. It would "look odd" were his pew in Mary-le-bone Church to be empty, when the Christmas holly adorning that in Ovington Church was dried up and withered; and a banker is bound to eschew all and anything that "looks odd." Everything about him, both in public and private life, should be as even as the balance of his books.

On the morning following Mrs. Hamlyn's arrival in town, just as her husband was setting off to the city, she was startled beyond measure by his placing in her hand notes to the amount of four hundred pounds.

"I consider it necessary," said he, "that my daughter should make her first appearance in society with all the advantages becoming Miss Hamlyn of Dean Park. She must have everything that is handsome and suitable; and let half the money in your hand be appropriated in addition to your own usual allowance."

"I assure you we neither of us require anything of the kind," exclaimed Mrs. Hamlyn, endeavouring to replace the notes in his hand. "I am not likely to incur any additional expenses."

"It is my *wish* that you should do so. I desire that no expense be spared in—"

"Surely, surely," interrupted Mrs. Hamlyn, unable to repress her amazement, "you informed me the other day, at Dean (in reference to your disappointments with regard to Harry), that the house was in no condition to support any additional stress on its resources at the present moment!"

"Are you mad?" cried her husband, suddenly seizing her arm, and drawing her away from the study-door, near which they were standing, towards the distant window. "The men are in the dining-room removing the breakfast things. If Ramsay should hear you—"

"I fancied myself speaking low."

"You spoke like a fool, as all women do the moment they pretend to talk about business!" cried Hamlyn, in reckless irritation. "Once for all, take these notes and employ them according to my instructions. It is my wish that you make arrangements for presenting Lydia at the next drawing-room."

"Still, there will be no occasion for such an expenditure as this. The utmost she requires is twenty guineas for a court dress. She has the fine pearls presented to her by Colonel Hamilton; and I am sorry to say I have accidentally discovered that he is having a pair of splendid diamond ear-rings reset for her at Rundell's!"

"I shall not allow her to accept them!" observed Mr. Hamlyn, sternly. "Such a display on the person of a girl would be considered an act of profligate extravagance on the part of a banker's family; and to explain them everywhere as the gift of Colonel Hamilton would be like announcing intentions towards her, on his part, which I neither expect nor wish to see realized to the injury of my son. Any one who wants to marry Lydia must be satisfied with her five thousand pounds."

"With such prospects it is surely unnecessary to indulge in a foolish outlay for her introduction to society," observed the banker's wife.

"No outlay is foolish that serves to advance my ulterior projects," replied the banker, with a sneer. "Do you suppose I sacrifice these four hundred pounds for the maintenance of Lydia's vanity, or of my own credit in the world?"

"In that case I am less disposed than ever to create in my poor girl a taste for expense at variance with your intentions in her behalf, and, incompatible as you have given me to believe, with the state of your affairs," replied Mrs. Hamlyn—the wife having at length borrowed courage from the mother to assert principles of her own.

The banker stood gazing upon her in utter astonishment. It was the first resistance to his will she had hazarded in the course of five-and-twenty years of married life; and her resolution was now too calmly and mildly asserted to afford him any hope of putting down her opposition by violence.

"You will follow your own devices in this!" he resumed, in a voice as moderate as her own. "Perhaps it ought not to surprise me that, at a moment when my interests in life are sinking, and all the world seems in league to press upon and overwhelm a falling man, my own family should be the first to rush in and give the signal for the insults of the rest."

By the involuntary start of the distressed Sophia, Hamlyn perceived that this stroke had told—that the feelings of the wife of his youth were touched to the quick.

"You shall be obeyed!" said she, extending her hand, with a desponding air, to receive the notes he was still holding. "All I have to entreat is, that when the tree of evil shall bring forth its bitter fruits, you will not accuse *me* of having fostered its growth."

"I thank you—you shall be accused of nothing!" replied Hamlyn coldly, yet apparently surmounting conflicting emotions. "We must stand or fall together. At our time of life, the standing or falling are of less consequence. The better half of our days is over; and, as far as I am concerned, the best they have afforded inspires me with little interest in the remainder. But the children demand our utmost exertions. The children have a long career before them. The fair prospects of Walter—the—the—"

He could not proceed. In naming his son, he was on the point of giving way to a weakness very unusual on the part of Hamlyn the banker. The heart of his wife thrilled within her as she contemplated what seemed to afford hope that the barren rock might still be touched, to yield forth the waters of life.

"By those prospects, then," cried she, clasping her hands in earnest entreaty—"by the future prosperity and happiness of your son, I implore you involve yourself no farther in difficulties beyond all power of extrication! If the firm be embarrassed, as you owned to me at Dean, let us retrench: let us cut short all idle expenses. We might reduce to a fifth part our present outlay. Why not, for instance, instead of commencing a showy, extravagant season, let this house to some advantageous tenant, and retire to Dean Park? You have apartments at the banking-house which—"

"I thank you," replied Hamlyn, with a bitter smile. "If you desired to place the names of Richard and Bernard Hamlyn in the Gazette, you could scarcely suggest a surer course of policy. I thank you! When I desire to rouse the anxieties of my customers, and point myself out to the mistrust of the city, I will apply to you for the speediest method of assuring my ruin. Till then, I will not trouble you for farther interference in my affairs than I have been hitherto in the habit of asking. I endeavour to render your life as easy as prosperity can make it. I have never sought to burden you with participation in my cares."

"I know it," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, in deep emotion; "and it is that very knowledge which makes me accuse myself as in some measure the origin of the position in which you stand. But for your desire to place your family in an honourable position in society, you—"

"Compose yourself—*you* have no share in the responsibility," was the banker's bitter answer. "But since you have become thus reckless in allusions to what cannot be even whispered in safety in the stillest watches of the night, I am to conclude that you adduced as an excuse for my breaking my engagement with Lord and Lady Rotherwood, that I was forced to hurry to London to parry the consequences of the recent failure at Liverpool?"

"You will scarcely accuse me of having ever injured your interests by my indiscretion," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, with a sinking heart and voice. "For the last twenty years, I have been keeping watch, with painful caution, over my words and actions. I excused you to the Rotherwoods on the general grounds of unlooked-for city business. But the countess was too much occupied by her sister's illness to take much heed of the affairs of any other person."

"The Marchioness of Dartford, then, is dangerously ill? In that case, her son will scarcely be able to join Walter at Melton?"

"I should think not. I was sorry to find Walter had so hastily quitted Dean, and for a place so likely to increase his expenses!"

"My son acted with my perfect approval," said the banker, coldly.

"Lady Rotherwood spoke to me with great regret of the dissipated habits of life in which her nephew is beginning to indulge. It is the desire of his family, it appears, that the marquis should settle young. He is an only child."

"And you fancy, perhaps, that the aunt who grudges him a few weeks' hunting at Melton, would promote his alliance with a girl having a few thousand pounds for her fortune!"

"It is not the *cost* of Lord Dartford's pleasures that creates the uneasiness of his family. With respect to Lydia, Lady Rotherwood was generous enough to express to me, in plain terms, that it would give her pleasure should her nephew attach himself to so sensible and prudent a girl as my daughter. I tell you this since you have thought proper to allude to the subject. But, having no reason to suppose the marquis's intentions serious, I shall dismiss it from my thoughts. Those of Lydia, I am certain, it has never entered."

"So much the better!" was Mr. Hamlyn's surly reply, as he prepared to quit the room for the shabby cabriolet, which, for nearly the first time, had been kept waiting by the unusual communicativeness of poor Sophia.

"I do not wish to see her head turned by vagaries so preposterous. Even were the match so possible, which it is not, it would ill suit me, at such a moment as this, to produce the sum indispensable for the dowry of a Marchioness of Dartford!"

Prepared by this painful interview for the course of policy her husband persisted in pursuing, it did not surprise Mrs. Hamlyn to find that a handsome new carriage was building for her, to be launched at the drawing-room, an excellent opera-box engaged; and that arrangements were already made for dinners twice a week in Cavendish Square, for three weeks to come.

"You certainly *are* the happiest woman in the world, my dear! You decidedly have the greatest jewel of a husband," cried Lady Bondwell, the wife of a brother banker, who was usually neck-and-neck with the Hamlyns in their course of ostentation. "I was at Storr and Mortimer's yesterday, and must say that your new wine-cistern is the most perfect thing I ever beheld! I might torment Sir Benjamin from now till the day of judgment, before he would give *me* anything of the kind! But what is there you have not got? Whenever I want to know what is to be the fashion for the season, I hasten to Cavendish Square."

This was, to a certain degree, true; but the luxuriousness imposed upon her was a matter of pain and grief to Mrs. Hamlyn. Though she might not presume to recur to the subject of pecuniary difficulties adverted to in the first instance by her husband, under the influence of the excitement produced by Henry's unlooked-for opposition to his wishes, she had reason to infer from the additional expenditure daily incurred by Mr. Hamlyn, and the forced spirits he exhibited in society, that his anxieties were undiminished. But for this, she would have been almost inclined to hope that her husband's apprehensions were assumed for the purpose of inducing her to influence the resolution of his son.

Such, at least, was the result of his strange confidences. Though she had failed in procuring Colonel Hamilton's interference with Henry, her own letters had reached her son during his absence from Cambridge; her own letters—full of the persuasive eloquence of maternal love; imploring him (without any prohibited allusion to the difficulties of the firm) for *her* sake—for the sake of the brother who loved him so dearly, to abstain from opposition to his father's will.

"I have reason to know," she wrote, "that the welfare of the family, of your brother and sisters (for of your mother, dearest, I will not even plead the claims) depends upon the certainty of a successor in the business, interested to protect their property in the event of your father's demise. Your cousin Bernard is weak—weak, alike in health and intellect, and every way incompetent for such a responsibility. I entreat you, therefore, my Henry, sacrifice your disinclination, and do the part of a son and brother towards us all! Your generous disposition cannot be better exercised than in such a self-sacrifice; your noble mind cannot exhibit its strength more usefully than in surmounting the reluctance you have so eloquently expressed. My son! your mother asks it of you on her knees! Make the trial—make the attempt! Do not—do not wantonly oppose your unhappy father!"

To such an appeal the answer of Henry was, of course, a promise of implicit submission; and Mrs. Hamlyn had the satisfaction of being the first to convey to her husband intelligence of his son's acquiescence in his plans. But poor Henry, while despatching to the admonitress he so reverently loved his dutiful compliance, was only too painfully aware that, like Coriolanus of old, submission to his mother conveyed ruin to himself. Compelled to resign his shortlived hopes of an enfranchisement from the calling he detested, which was to secure him the hand of the woman he adored, he sank; his mind became comparatively disabled. Those who were watching with interest his course of study, now so nearly approaching its crisis, saw, with grief and wonderment, that, at the eleventh hour, the young man's courage was deserting him. His exertions were flagging. There seemed no longer an incentive for study, now that the utmost distinctions he could obtain would avail him nothing towards the redemption of his destinies!

"She will never be mine! She has told me she will never be mine if I involve myself in the hateful speculations which have so hardened the heart and dried up the very nature of my father," was his ever-recurring reflection. "To have marred my own prospects in life by compliance with her peculiar prejudices on this point, I should not, Heaven knows, have hesitated. But my mother—my poor, dear mother, appealing to me in behalf of her children, was not to be denied. Scarcely more painful to me to renounce all hope of Ellen's affections, than it would have been to refuse the request of my inestimable mother.

Still, the result of the conflict in his mind was not the less injurious. He could no longer command his attention to the abstruseness of science; no longer apply the sterling faculties of his mind to the conquest of difficulties which he held mere trifles so long as he presumed to hope that university distinctions were to pave the way to professional success; and professional success to entitle him to independence and the hand of the most beautiful and most beloved.

"Oh! that I had never attempted that mad expedition to Naples!" he would exclaim, fling-

ing down his books, and pacing with hurried steps the quiet room, so long and so successfully devoted to the abstraction of study. "But for my enthusiastic desire to look once more upon that lovely face, the object of my dreams from boyhood (from the moment when, as a happy bride, she spoke so soothingly to the young enthusiast who beset her at Dean with his flighty fancies!) I might now be happy—the same dull, contented bookworm as of old, the same prospective man of business. Till Ellen Hamilton placed the picture of a banker's calling fairly before me, with all that eloquence of look and speech with which no breathing woman was ever gifted like herself, I was contented with my prospects. But now—even if she would consent to share them (and I know that no earthly persuasion or representation would shake *her* resolution!)—even if she would consent to share a mode of existence she detests and despises, I feel that I could never be happy deriving my livelihood from perpetual risk of the property of others. Wretched man that I shall be, the moment I quit these quiet walls, to plunge into all the vulgar strife and chicanery with which henceforward I must live surrounded. Wretched, wretched man! Without leisure to open a book—without the power to forget or to renew those blessed hopes and impressions, which seem to have been vouchsafed me for a moment only to constitute the ruin and torment of my life!"

Instead of persevering in the course of study pointed out as indispensable to repair the omissions produced by his Italian tour, the dispirited Henry wasted his days and nights in perpetual recurrence to the past, in cultivating associations derived from the relics around him—the sketches—the engravings—and, above all, the luckless myrtle branch—the first pledge of an ill-fated attachment—which he had received from the hands of Ellen when visiting with Lady Burlington and herself the Grotto of the Sybil at Cumæ.

"What matters it *now* how I go through my examination!" cried he, shrugging his shoulders, on receiving a dispiriting announcement that others were getting the start of him in the race. "If I could carry off all the prizes in the university, of what avail? What signify college honours to Henry Hamlyn, the banker!"

In writing to announce to Mrs. Hamilton the retractation of his engagement with herself, and his compliance with the injunctions of his mother, Henry had not presumed to give vent to these imbittered feelings.

"She used to call me boyish and inconsistent," was his cruel reflection. "How often did she remind me that she is nearly two years older than myself in age, and ten years older in character! When I pledged myself to comply to the letter with her exactions about the firm, she predicted all that has happened; she told me I should never have strength of purpose to carry through my opposition to a man so coldly arbitrary as my father. Again and again did she prognosticate all that has happened; while I, strong in the encouragement of her presence—in the happiness of being near her—of listening to that stirring voice—of gazing upon that heavenly face—felt certain of my own resolution, and pledged myself heart and soul to the stipulations under which she promised at some future time to become my own. Dear, precious Ellen! It is something that even for a moment she deigned to recognise the existence of such a nothing as myself! But I will not attempt to move her compassion by the pitiful avowal of all I am suffering. If unable to redeem my word to her, if unable to act the part of an honourable man, I will not sneakingly content myself with obtaining the abnegation of her principles and feelings. She was frank with me—she opened her inmost heart—she owned she could not be happy with me if the greater portion of my days were spent in my father's counting-house. It were despicable to attempt to overcome these scruples by the picture of my misery—my despair."

Cold, therefore, almost to formality, were the terms in which the high-minded young man announced a sacrifice, the mere anticipation of which was tearing his heart-strings asunder; and Ellen was fully justified in feeling, in the bitterness of her mortification, that already the spirit of his future vocation was upon him, and that he "wrote like a banker." Not a word of appeal to her affections; not a loophole left for her relenting. So firmly did he speak of himself, so coolly of his projects, that there was every reason to suppose he rejoiced in the difficulties she had thrown in the way of their attachment by imposing unaccomplishable conditions.

"If my poor, dear mother only surmised the extent of the sacrifice she was exacting from her son!" was Henry's ejaculation, after perusing for the twentieth time the measured, the almost haughty reply of Ellen Hamilton to the letter acknowledging his altered intentions, and renouncing their brief engagement. "If she only knew! But may she never know it! As it is, her life, I fear, is not a happy one. It would only be a thousand-fold more grievous for learning that she has broken my heart."

"I'm most afraid, my dear girl, that you calculated too far on your own patience?" observed the colonel, on the other hand, to his lovely daughter-in-law, when, at the end of a fortnight's sojourn at Burlington Manor, he perceived that her steps were growing less lightsome in their walks, and her voice less joyous in their conversations, than on her first arrival. "You didn't reckon what 'twould be to live cooped up, morning, noon, and night, with an old codger like myself!"

"I do not experience the slightest want of society," she replied, and with sincerity, to this apology.

"I can promise you, however, that when I pressed you so hard to come and stay at the Manor, I wouldn't have done so for worlds, hadn't I thought that Lydia and her good mother would be on the spot, to cheer you with their constant company, as they did *me* through the summer and autumn. Poor Madam Markham is always taken up (and the more's the credit to her) with her bantlings and her poor; and as to those great folks at the Hyde, I believe you might get as good companionship out of the alabaster effigies of their forefathers on the tombs in Braxham Church!"

"If all the rest of the family resemble Mr. Vernon," replied Ellen, "I cannot express much regret for the want of their acquaintance."

"They *don't* resemble him, my dear; they're ten times worse! Alberic's the best of the bunch. However, he gave me a welcome piece of news yesterday, when he stopped my phaeton as I was driving through Ovington. Walter Hamlyn will be at Dean Park to-morrow; that is, young Vernon told me Lord Dartford was

coming; and I don't suppose the captain would leave him to be entertained by the servants. So *now*, my dear, you'll be able at last to extend your rides beyond the park-paling of Burlington Manor."

"I have not the least desire to play truant," she replied, with a melancholy smile, how different from those which brightened her fine features on her first arrival from Italy. "It is not the want of knight or esquire that keeps me faithful to the old avenue. I am quite satisfied with Carlo's protection, if I had it at heart to scour the country."

"Without scouring the country, you may extend your excursions to see something of the neighbourhood. However, you must look to your heart, Ellen, I can tell you, when this young soldier comes flourishing his mustaches by our fireside! Watty's the handsomest young fellow, perhaps, you ever set eyes on in your life."

"My weakness does not happen to be in favour of handsome young fellows," replied Mrs. Hamilton, trying to assume the cheerful tone she knew to be so acceptable to her father-in-law. "The beauty of the Neapolitan peasants is quite enough to put one out of conceit with handsome men for the remainder of one's days. Since I travelled in the Abruzzi, an involuntary association of ideas always depicts a handsome man to *me* as weak, superstitious, cowardly, dirty, and sensual."

"A true picture, I dare say, my dear, as regards the Italian brigand! But Watty wouldn't thank you, I take it, for applying the likeness to *him*. To own the truth, Ellen," continued the colonel, determined to approach nearer to the subject upon which he had consistently imposed silence on himself than he had yet adventured, "to own the truth, I've more than half a wish at the bottom of my heart, that if you *should* ever make up your mind to marry again—"

"I never *shall!*" interrupted Ellen, in a low but steady voice. "You may rely upon it that I never shall!"

"I am sorry to hear you say so. Sacred as is my son's memory in my eyes, I feel that you didn't live long enough with my poor Robert, and that you're yourself too young and handsome, *much* too young and handsome, to tie yourself down to widowhood for the remainder of your days. 'Tisn't nat'ral, my dear, and 'tisn't what anybody has a right to expect of you. So, as I was saying, if you ever *were* to take another husband, I can't but own that my friend Hamlyn's son would be more acceptable to me as a son-in-law than e'er another. For a son-in-law your husband would seem to me! Now that I've come to see, and know, and love you, Ellen! trust me, I feel as if you were a born daughter of my own."

As the colonel had confidently expected, the cheeks of his lovely companion were deeply crimsoned at his allusion to his "friend, Hamlyn's son." But he would have wanted courage to push an inquiry intruding on her confidence, even had not his own heart enlisted itself in what he was saying, before the conclusion of his sentence, to a degree that utterly precluded all artful examination of her symptoms of emotion.

"And so, my dear," he resumed, after a momentary pause that produced not a syllable of reply from his companion, "if this Household-brigade chap should happen to take your fancy, so much the better for all parties. Hamlyn would be proud, I'm sure, to ask for his own son the hand he was so idly scrupulous about bestowing upon mine."

"I have no doubt he would, after hearing your paternal declarations in my favour," replied the young widow, with a swelling heart and bitter smile. "Your *heiress*, my dear Colonel Hamilton, whether actress, seamstress, or any other disreputable thing, would be welcomed on his bended knees into the family of the banker."

"Come, come! don't be too hard upon my friend! Hamlyn's the most honourable fellow upon the face of the earth! I could tell you some of the finest traits of Hamlyn that do honour to the name of man! Surely, my dear Ellen, since you've been down in these parts, you must have seen and admitted the value of an active, benevolent, steady, thoughtful man of business, to all the varied interests of the neighbourhood under his protection?"

"I have no doubt Mr. Hamlyn is a man of considerable influence and importance. He contributes largely to the local charities. So does Mr. Gratwycke (the fourth part, I am told, of his very moderate income!), which does not prevent my thinking the old gentleman a far from satisfactory companion."

"Ay, ay! a man may pay a large subscription to the treasurer of an hospital, and be none the better Christian for that. Gratwycke, for instance, a case in point, is always boasting that, though his estate is reduced to half by the badness of the times and excellence of the poor laws, he contributes to a guinea what his father did afore him to the support of the county institutions, invariably adding, 'It shall never be said that the name of Gratwycke of Gratwycke forfeited its rank among the county families in *my* time!' I'm not such an old oaf, Ellen, my dear, as to mistake that sort o' thing for benevolence! But Hamlyn's another description of fellow. Hamlyn sets his wits to work as well as his purse, for the benefit of his fellow-creatures! Look at the number of useful measures he has brought into Parliament. See here!" continued the colonel, suddenly snatching forward the Times newspaper that lay upon the table, and commencing as fluently as the absence of his spectacles would permit, a recital of the proceedings of a grand "Meeting of the Merchants and Bankers of the City of London," held at the Mansion House the preceding day, "Richard Hamlyn, Esq., M.P., banker, in the chair, for the relief of the sufferers by a recent inundation at St. Petersburg," &c., &c., &c., prefaced by an eloquent preamble, and followed by a pompous list of subscriptions, at the head of which stood the firm of Hamlyn and Co. for £105. "What d'ye say to *that*, eh, my dear Ellen?"

"I should say, were I not afraid you would call me prejudiced and illiberal, that Hamlyn and Co. are probably extensively connected with the Russia trade."

Colonel Hamilton, who knew this to be actually the case, could neither refrain from a laugh, nor from patting her approvingly on the back.

"You're a cunning little gipsy!" said he. "Let a woman alone for diving into motives."

"Let a woman alone for diving into motives who has been cast alone and unprotected on the evil-dealing of the world! Had I never been vilified and injured by Mr. Hamlyn, I had probably been content to take his virtues, as others do, on trust. As it is, our paths happily lie separate; nor should I have hazarded these remarks, sir, upon a man whom you regard, but

for your recommendation of Captain Hamlyn to my affection. Even here, even in this house, from which I consider my poor friend Lady Burlington to have been driven into exile by the cunning of her husband's executor, I have never before presumed to lift up my voice against him; and in order to secure perfect unanimity between us (for I would fain that, during my stay with you, not even a difference of opinion should manifest itself), I promise to avoid all farther mention of his name."

"A kind and a good resolution, my dear, and I thank you heartily," rejoined the colonel. "However, as this is the last time we're to have my poor friend on the spit, let's even give him another turn and roast him to rags! Tell me, Nelly, like an honest soul as you are, have you any quarrel against the banker beyond a woman's nat'ral unforgivingness, for his unhandsome usage of you more years ago than I care to remember?"

"No *quarrel*, sir. But I own myself guilty of strong prejudice against a man whose only thought and object in life is the lucre of gain."

"Then, my dear girl, you must dislike *me!* For you may rely upon't that, for more than forty years of my life, my sole object was to heap up lacs of rupees, obtain the best interest for 'em, and—"

"But for what *purpose*, my dear sir?" interrupted Ellen; "and to what end? What did you sacrifice towards the acquisition of wealth, beyond your own time, convenience, comfort, and abilities? or to what was the wealth, thus acquired, destined, but to secure the well-being of your family, the happiness of all around you? *Whose* property did you put in peril by your speculations? *whose* substance did you waste by your transactions? to whom did you lend money on usurious interest, facilitating the extravagance that wrought their undoing, till the place of their forefathers knew them no longer? and when were the riches thus vilely acquired applied to the scarcely less contemptible purpose of dazzling the eyes of society by false appearances, and figuring among the shifting throngs of London life? Show me the object of Mr. Hamlyn's domestic affections, show me the household happiness created by the hollow ostentations of *his* ill-earned wealth! A broken-spirited wife, a daughter who scarcely uplifts her eyes in his presence, and one, at least, among his sons thwarted in the dearest and brightest ambitions of his heart, in order to fulfil the narrow purposes of parental policy!"

"And how the plague do you know all this?" cried the colonel. "God knows such is not the picture *I* ever painted you of Dean Park!"

"You forget," replied his daughter-in-law, disappointing his expectations of having betrayed her into the avowal of her intimacy with Henry Hamlyn, "that I was a whole week the inmate of Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn, only three years ago."

"All I can say is, then, that you made the most of your time! However, as you mentioned before, Walter was away with his regiment when you were at Dean; and of *his* position as regards his father, you had no means of judging. Of Walter, believe me, Ellen, Hamlyn's as fond as ever I was of e'er a child of mine! To Walter he would make any sacrifice!"

Mrs. Hamilton shook her head with an incredulous smile.

"Well, well! Some day or other you'll be forced to own there's nothing in nature Hamlyn knows how to refuse to his eldest son."

"Right, sir—to his *eldest son!* Those two words explain the whole secret of Walter Hamlyn's influence. I see by your face that already you accuse me of illiberality. But I declare to you I should as soon expect to pluck a living, fragrant flower from under the scorching lava effused by a volcano, as detect a tender, human feeling in the heart systematically devoted to money-getting by the slave-trade, or by speculation with the means of others!"

"Nay, but surely—"

"No, no, no! I will not hear a single extenuating word!" cried Mrs. Hamilton. "I loath the hard, unsympathizing nature created by perpetually deafening the ears to the cries of our fellow-creatures, or by incessant contact with money—money—money! In *my* view, Mr. Hamlyn is less than a man—a mummy created by the Gannalizing process of injecting his very arteries with metallic fluid. I could no more experience sympathy with such an individual than with—"

"The Marquis of Dartford and Captain Hamlyn!" announced Johnston, throwing open the drawing-room door.

And it was with her fine face glowing under the influence of her recent denunciations that Ellen had to do the honours of Burlington Manor to the two handsome young strangers now hastily presented to her by her father-in-law.

CHAPTER XV.

"The portion of the world which I at present
Have taken up to fill the following sermon,
Is one of which there's no description recent;
The reason why is easy to determine,
Although it seems both prominent and pleasant,
There is a sameness in its gems and ermine."

BYRON.

"By heavens! my dear Hamlyn, I am beginning to twig what Vernon was after, this morning, when we found him lounging along the Ovington Road, in spite of an east wind that might have cut the county jail asunder, and craning over the park-palings of Burlington Manor!" said the marquis to his friend, as they rode back together to Dean Park. "What a beautiful woman!"

"I told you you would lose your heart!" replied Walter, with a forced smile.

"But I have *not* lost my heart! The widow is a splendid creature, but I should as soon think of falling in love with Homer's ox-eyed Juno! I hate your Grecian, Medea-like beauties, who look like the tragic muse walking in silk attire; and who ought to carry a dagger and bowl, instead of a caudle-cup and bodkin. I should always expect to find this beautiful Ellen of yours wandering about Dartford Hall in her sleep, like Lady Macbeth! My blood curdles at the thought! No, no! not the least fear of my trying to cut you out with the rich widow."

"Nor of *my* resenting it, if you did!" replied Walter. "I have no pretensions in that quarter."

"Why, I heard the old gentleman hinting to my Aunt Rotherwood, when I was last at Dean, that nothing would suit him better than to have you for a son-in-law!"

"One don't marry a woman for the sake of pleasing her father-in-law."

"Why, one *does*, sometimes, when the father-in-law happens to have four hundred thousand

pounds to make ducks and drakes of; besides being so capital a fellow as old Hamilton. Why, you might buy out the Burlingtons (their property's famously embarrassed, I'm told), and throw the manor into a ring-fence with Dean Park."

"As another *ring fence* must be accomplished at the same time," said Walter, laughing, "the prospect does not charm me. I should never feel at my ease with such a wife as Mrs. Hamilton. She would reduce one to too complete a pigmy."

"Ay, ay! I see we agree about her in the main. To paraphrase the old fellow they misquoted, the other night, so outrageously in the house, she—

is too bright and good
For human nature's daily food.

To *my* taste a woman cannot be too commonplace. The commonplace of a genuine woman—that is, a feminine, gentle, lovely, lovely edition of man—is perfection. I like it as I like the commonplace of an oak-tree, or of 'a rose-tree in full bearing.' 'Tis a thing that can't be improved upon. The case of woman ought not to be declinable—there is nothing better than good. *Best* is a pleonasm, a work of supererogation. Good ought to suffice for man; that is, every man ought to fancy his own 'good' the best."

"You are splitting your straws somewhat fine this morning, my dear Dar!" cried Walter. "Is it to revenge yourself that 'tis *dies non* with the hounds with such weather for a run?"

"Why, you see I've been shut up at Dartford Hall for the last fortnight, with only my poor mother and her chaplain, my old tutor; with whom I was forced to chop logic, to prevent myself from chopping off his head—and so much for Buckingham. But seriously, my dear fellow (if one ever *can* talk seriously where petticoats are concerned), don't you think that in every-day life Mrs. Hamilton would be apt to pile up the agony too high? There are three leading points to consider in a woman—heart, soul, body (that's *my* interpretation of the allegory of the three graces). Not a woman in a million unites perfection in the three. Two, therefore, are as much as a moderate man ought to pretend to, and *one* might, on a pinch, suffice. A pretty woman with a good heart, therefore, constitutes my irresistible. As an enemy to monopoly in all shapes, I dispense with the soul; so, while *I* content myself with a warm-hearted, pretty little wife, *you* shall have the handsome widow, with her great soul, all to your own share."

"How easy it is to perceive, in your estimate of women and wives, the notions of a man to whom birth and fortune offer no temptations!" said Walter, almost with a sigh. "Very few are able to abstract themselves from such considerations. Very few of us can afford to choose a woman for herself. Half our regiment (pray admit) would rate the three graces of a wife as 'beauty, rank, fortune.'"

"'Tis clear, however, my dear Hamlyn, that *you* do not subscribe to the doctrine, since you will have nothing to say to a beautiful creature with twelve or fifteen thousand a year."

"*I* require something a little more refined than Bob Hamilton's widow," replied Walter, impertinently. "I should be very fastidious, I fear, about the dress and manners of *my* wife."

"Pho, pho! the dress and manners of a woman may be fashioned into what you please."

"Not where there is a deficiency of natural taste. For instance, you would never teach the beautiful Ellen to come into a room with the instinctive elegance of Miss Vernon."

"Instinctive fiddlestick! Miss Vernon is made up of what *you* call elegance—a mere empty egg-shell! She has not even the womanly dignity of Mrs. Hamilton; far less the natural feeling and untaught grace of your sister Lydia. By-the-way, Hamlyn, I bet you a pound we receive an invitation to the Hyde before this time to-morrow."

"I'll double the stake if you promise to accept it when it arrives," said Walter.

"What! after engaging ourselves to the old colonel; and when I've set my heart on getting that Lion Hunt out of him again? I tried to give it to old Parson Buckingham at Dartford Hall. But I suppose I failed, for I couldn't get his wig to stand on end, as poor dear Lord and Lady Rotherwood's did, while they were listening to Colonel Hamilton."

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried the marquis, when, that very evening, cards of invitation to the two young men arrived from the Vernons. "I wish Alberic had staked his chin on the park-palings of Burlington Manor this morning, before he carried back news of our arrival to the Hyde! Blessed, however, be the said manor among the nations! for it affords us an undeniable excuse to these officious people."

And with the utmost glee Lord Dartford proceeded to plead a previous engagement in his answer to the Vernons, while Walter could scarcely repress a sigh at having to confess a similar disqualification. It was almost *too* mortifying to have to renounce a visit to the Hyde, in company with the Marquis of Dartford, when qualified by his recent visit to Melton to charm the ears of Lucinda by a thousand inedited anecdotes of fashionable gossip, for the mere purpose of joining a humdrum family dinner-party at Burlington Manor.

On the other hand, the excuse of the young men was received with as ill a grace as Walter's was despatched.

"Was ever anything so provoking!" cried Lady Vernon, tossing Lord Dartford's formal note into her daughter's workbasket. "Engaged, they write word, to those people at Burlington! And after all the difficulty, I had to obtain your father's sanction to my inviting young Hamlyn here again!"

"We must take Lord Dartford as we can get him," replied Lucinda, coolly. "Love me, love my banker, or, rather, my banker's son!"

"But you see we do not get him the more for tolerating his banker's son! It appears likely we shall have to love his Colonel Hamilton into the bargain."

"Impossible, now the Middleburys are gone! One could bear the old savage diluted with Middleburys. Out of the question to have him here now. Papa would be obliged to have recourse to his colchicum, as he does against a flying gout! Heigho!"

"Barlow of Alderham was telling me the other day that this daughter-in-law, who is staying with Colonel Hamilton, is one of the most beautiful women in England," observed Lady Vernon.

"Daughter-in-law? I thought he had no children, and that the horrid Hamlyns were to inherit his fortune?"

"This is his son's widow, whom they want to marry to the banker's son."

"And a very suitable match," replied Lucinda. "But very suitable matches seldom take place. And supposing, as the Dean Park girl is out of the way, that Dartford himself should become attracted by this new beauty?"

"Mother! you should really make the sacrifice of calling at Burlington!" cried Lucinda, after a long pause for reflection. "It is essential we should see what this Mrs. Hamilton is like, and ascertain what she is about. You will scarcely believe that Mr. Barlow had the coolness to hint to me she would be a capital match for Alberic, who appeared immensely smitten on seeing her the other day at the meeting of the hounds at Braxham Heath."

"Mr. Barlow had better be more cautious in his observations," said Lady Vernon, rising stern, tall, and square, from her cabriolet *fauteuil*. "Lord Vernon's son ally himself with the daughter of the person who proposed that poor Clansawney should be hanged? A nondescript Mrs. Robert Hamilton become Viscountess Braxham? for, between ourselves, my dear Inda, there is every chance of a change of ministry, and then, you know, your father's earldom is safe!"

"So much the better, mamma. It is almost too hard to be called Miss Vernon, like a Miss Hamlyn, or a Miss Barlow! But about this visit to Burlington Manor?"

"You know I can refuse you nothing. If your father will consent, we can drive there tomorrow. To say the truth, Alberic has been already at me on the subject. Alberic has only paired off till the hunting is over, and wants, I suspect, to see something of this Oriental beauty before he goes to town. As to *marrying* her! Of course he means nothing but a flirtation."

To Lady Vernon's surprise, she obtained from her lord not only permission to proceed to Burlington Manor, but, having proceeded thither without finding the beauty at home, to invite her and Colonel Hamilton to dinner, as a pretext for a new invitation to the young fox-hunters at Dean Park.

"This really exceeds belief!" was her ladyship's exclamation on receiving an answer from Mrs. Hamilton, which, while opening, she had not an instant doubted must be one of acceptance. "These people are engaged, Lucinda, actually engaged; and I will give you a month to guess to whom!"

"To the Barlows, or Gratwyckes, of course. There is no one else at present in the neighbourhood; for the Hursts, I conclude, do not invite people to assist them and their hungry locusts of children, with their boiled mutton and turnips? Papa ordered a neck of venison, yesterday, to Alderham, as we were riding home by the keeper's lodge."

"Country gentlemen do not give dinners on the strength of a neck of doe-venison!" said Lady Vernon, with a smile of contempt. "Guess again!"

"Such people are scarcely worth the trouble. They cannot come, and there is an end of the matter."

"By no means the end of it! They will be able to boast to the Elvastons, on arriving at Ormeau, of having refused in *their* favour an invitation to the Hyde. Just conceive what a triumph for that impertinent Lady Cossington, who, I have reason to know, fancies she cut you out with the marquis!"

"But what in the world can take these people to Ormeau?"

"I cannot guess. Alberic told me he noticed an intimacy, at covert, between the duke and that dreadful old colonel. I must repeat that I think it rather hard of Lord Vernon to have placed impediments in the way of our intimacy with the only family fit to associate with in this part of the county. Judge, by their taking up these strange people, how glad the Elvastons and Cossingtons would have been, had your father seemed disposed to be sociable! You see they have never invited Alberic."

"They could scarcely ask *him* without *us*."

"Unless I am much mistaken, they will invite Captain Hamlyn, with Lord Dartford; yet the Dean Park people, I know, are on the most distant terms at Ormeau."

"What a charming party they will have!" mused Lucinda Vernon, deeply mortified; "and what a winter have we brought upon ourselves by coming hither! Thank goodness, next week will put an end to it; and if I am not rewarded for my patience by a month at Brighton, I will appeal to Sir Henry, next year, and get myself *seriously* ordered to Naples. After all, dear mamma, don't you think we might have managed to make the six weeks seem a little less like twelve, if we had been on pleasanter terms with our neighbours? Had we been friendly with the Hamlyns, we should have met Lord Dartford at their house; had we been friendly with the Elvastons, at theirs; had we been friendly with Colonel Hamilton, even at Burlington Manor! And since we thought Lord Dartford's company worth a journey to Naples to secure, surely the lesser sacrifice of a few boring country visits was no consideration! My father dislikes the Duke of Elvaston as a greater man than himself, and despises the other two, as infinitely below him. Where are we to find the level which is to enable us to enjoy society? As the German emperor observed, when requested by his nobles to exclude all but the higher classes from the Augarten at Vienna, 'You insist, then, upon meeting none but your equals? Were *I* to attend to this rule, I must shut myself up in the family vault of my ancestors in the Augustine Church!' Next winter, accordingly, if papa persists in his unsociality, Alberic and I will be driven for society to the old gentlemen and ladies in armour and farthingales on the monuments in Braxham Church!"

The invitation which proved thus aggravating to the ire of Lucinda Vernon had produced, meanwhile, little emotion at Burlington, unless as affording a satisfactory excuse for evading a visit to the Hyde. Colonel Hamilton was averse, as he had stated in apology to the Rotherwoods, to all large parties of strangers, and the same plea would probably have been again brought forward but for his desire that his charming Ellen should enjoy something more suitable to her age than the seclusion of his dull fireside.

As regarded her natural inclinations, on the other hand, Mrs. Hamilton found more attraction in the cheerful domesticity of the manor than in all the excitements of fashionable life. But she was *not* now in a natural state of mind. She was mortified, restless, resentful. Her heart was weary with incessant reflections. She began to believe that some peculiar destiny attached the Hamlyns to her path, to injure her and molest. From *them* came all the bitterness of her life; from them her sole humiliations. Richard Hamlyn had been the means of injuring her fair fame; of bringing down the gray

hairs of her mother with sorrow to the grave; of developing in the slight frame of her husband the germe of mortal infirmity. Scarcely had she raised her head from the deep despair produced by this series of calamities; scarcely had she begun to find anew in life those gleams of domestic happiness rarely extinguishable in the prime of youth and beauty, when a being had thrown himself in her way, endowed to excess with the qualities most likely to captivate her imagination and attach her heart: for the young widow had already become painfully conscious of the loneliness of her social position. The passionate affection of which she had been for years the object served only to render her more sensible of her present isolation; and when the young enthusiast, with whom she was unexpectedly brought into contact in the domestic circle of Lady Burlington, surrendered himself as devoted a slave to her beauty as in better days that gentle reserved sufferer whom she had seen sink into the grave, the only drawback to the hopes of renewed happiness was, that the man so passion-struck, and so qualified by the highest endowments of nature to render his preference a blessing, was the son of her enemy, the future successor of Hamlyn, the banker!

And now, all that in the first moment she had dreaded, was fatally come to pass. She had predicted Henry's strengthlessness against the iron will of such a father. She had announced to him that, on his return to England, he would be compelled to adhere to a calling and career which she was firmly resolved should never obtain an influence over her wedded life. And thus compelled to abjure her hopes of happiness, she was alone again—more alone, more isolated than ever—because aroused by the recent manifestations of Henry Hamlyn's respectful but passionate attachment to a sense of the unequalled happiness of confiding, mutual love.

Against his father, as the origin of Henry's change of feeling and the sudden relinquishment of his generous intentions, all her resentment was directed; but she was not the less wretched, the less deeply humiliated, that she was able to attribute this new blighting of her destinies to the malignant influence of her former enemy.

Thus disappointed in the hopes which had accelerated her return to England, thus imbittered in her feelings against Dean Park, even the sincere affection she was beginning to entertain for her kind father-in-law did not reconcile her to herself or to her mortifications. She felt conscious of having too easily bestowed her heart; she accused herself of faithlessness to the memory of the dead. Rebuked by the supposed fickleness of Harry, she fancied that she was only justly punished for having, after all her earlier vows of perpetual widowhood, again inclined her ear to the blandishments of worldly affection.

Amid these morbid recriminations of self-reproach, the quiet seclusion of Burlington ceased to charm. She hated to find herself exposed, in all the familiarity of its tranquil fireside, to the curious examination of Walter. Suffering and dispirited, she dreaded the idea that he would describe, in his letters to his brother, her swollen eyelids and tear-stained cheeks; and it was, consequently, a relief to be invited from home while Captain Hamlyn was the inmate of Dean Park.

For Lady Vernon was premature in her supposition that Walter and his friend would be asked to meet the Hamiltons at Ormeau. No such project had been a moment entertained. The Elvastons were plaindealing and somewhat oldfashioned people, who, never having been on terms of intimacy with either Richard Hamlyn or his father, would have conceived it impossible suddenly to establish a familiarity with Walter, merely because he happened to have their young friend, Lord Dartford, as his guest.

That the old gentleman for whom his grace's friend, Mr. Gratwycke of Gratwycke, had inspired him with such sincere respect, should produce such additional recommendations as a country neighbour as having for his inmate the beautiful Mrs. Hamilton, warmly commended to the Marchioness of Cossington by her sister, Lady Devereux, the wife of the English minister at Florence, was an unexpected delight to all parties; and in welcoming Ellen to Ormeau, the ladies of the family soon made her aware of their opinion that all they had previously heard in her favour fell far short of the impressions created by herself.

In the large and multifarious party assembled at the Duke of Elvaston's, Colonel Hamilton, meanwhile, found himself far more in his place than in the ultra-fashionable circle of the Hyde. Lord Cossington, the heir-apparent of the family, was little more than a good-humoured country gentleman, who devoted half the year to his duties as a member of Parliament, and the other half to his pleasures as a sportsman; while the Duke of Elvaston himself was but the best of family-men, lord-lieutenants, and masters of fox-hounds. Moreover, the father of Lady Cossington, Sir Robert Maitland, who was fortunately staying in the house, was not only an old general of brigade, but had commanded in India, in a country, and among troops, familiarly known to Colonel Hamilton. With such companions, he was instantly at his ease, without being too *much* at his ease. No boys like Dartford to tempt him into buffoonery; no solemn prigs like Lord Vernon to taunt him into petulant reproof!

There was something in the solid but noble simplicity of the house, that enchanted him. Ormeau exhibited neither the imposing historical dignity of the Hyde, nor the modern elegance of Dean Park and the manor. It was a vast commodious mansion, built by Inigo Jones, and furnished half a century ago with a degree of taste and richness precluding all interference with its arrangements; till, at the close of another half century or so, and another growth and fall of timber, sentenced to be furnished again. There were no nicknacks, no modern prettinesses, no fashionable *fauteuils* at Ormeau. The huge Nankin vases on the pier-tables had probably been bought in Queen Anne's time at the New Exchange or India House; the rich Japan screens, at the toy-shop of Mrs. Chenevix. The last portrait of the family collection was the present duke, when a boy, by Hoppner. Not so much as one of the graceful and emasculate pictures of Lawrence to connect the square, roomy simplicity of Ormeau with the flimsy elegances of the day! The duchess deposited her crochet-work, every night, in the huge, oldfashioned Tonbridge-ware workbox presented to her by the duke, on the birth of one of her children twenty years before; and, by way of writing-desk, a little inlaid ebony letter-case, which she

had used as a bride, still served her correspondence with her grandchildren.

The same stand-still order of things pervaded all the habits and connexions of the house. The Duke and Duchess of Elvaston stood too substantially in the world to veer about with every wind of doctrine. The people with whom they had associated in their youth were their associates in their age. They used the same tradespeople, and entertained the same friends. No running after new systems or patent inventions. Happy, respectable, dignified, they desired no changes save such as were forced upon them by the progressive spirit of the times.

A totally different view of the business of life held good among these people, and among the Vernons. The Elvastons conceived themselves to live at Ormeau, and looked upon London as a place of pastime; whereas the family at the Hyde regarded the country as a place reluctantly endured, during the intervals of glorious London. Much of this arose from the circumstance that the Elvastons were not court-haunters; that they had no rank to intrigue for—no daughter to marry. Their chief pleasure in life consisted in that princely hospitality which affects no display, but knows no intermission. Ormeau was literally what is called an "open house." For months, nay, years together, the family never sat down to dinner alone. As to the hounds, in which the duke was supposed to take such intense delight, and which had obtained an almost proverbial name in England, they were, in fact, merely an item in the amusements he felt bound to provide for his friends and neighbours. Impossible for a man to have a more kindly or sociable idea of the duties connected with the rank and fortune assigned him by inheritance.

Nevertheless, the service of plate on his grace's table was what Lord Vernon would have considered oldfashioned and mean. There was no splendid *dessus de table*, as at the Hyde; no effigies of ancestors on war-horses in gold or gilt plate; nor any of the little table fopperies dear to the systematic dinner-givers of the day. The sideboard of the very Hamlyns was more showy; for the phrase "living in good style" would have passed for a sad vulgarism at Ormeau.

The colonel was as much delighted as amused to perceive in what a different light men and things were considered by his new friends and by the flashy Vernons. At Ormeau, the lights and shadows of life were broader, and motives as clearly laid open as actions. All was fair and aboveboard. No subterraneous story to the edifice—no masked attic! The sun shone searchingly into the whole structure.

Among other peculiarities, he found that Hamlyn never was depreciatingly alluded to, as by the Vernons, as a mere man of business—a city banker. In the eyes of the Duke of Elvaston and his son, he was simply a political influence —the Tory member for Barsthorpe—one of the ayes or noes of their party. Even the Vernons, great as they were in their own conceit and that of the sexton of Braxham Church, represented at Ormeau only the Whig member for an adjoining county, and the defeated Whig interest for Barsthorpe.

The colonel had not been many minutes in the house, before he found himself engaged in earnest conversation with Lord Cossington and his father-in-law, concerning the very questions on which he had been able to afford information to Lord Crawley. Aware that the question of the Indian war was about to be brought before Parliament, the two painstaking Tory members were eager to make themselves masters of the subject from the fountain head; little suspecting that the Home Secretary himself had drained it dry, and that any intelligence they might extort from Colonel Hamilton was only robbing their poor friend, Crawley, of his parliamentary "thunder."

A little later, and Colonel Hamilton was startled by an inquiry from the duke himself, of whether he intended to get into Parliament. In that house, it was held that a man of fortune had no civil existence, unless he was in the house. The Ormeau interest carried with it six votes. The Ormeau interest constituted a little party; and it seemed impossible to the marquis and his father that any man could feel engaged in the active business of life, unless connected therewith by that wisp of straw called parliamentary influence. Nevertheless, the duke's simple question of "Have you no thoughts, my dear sir, of getting into the house?" sounded in the old gentleman's ears much as if his grace had said, "When are you likely to be consecrated Archbishop of York?" He excused himself, therefore, with a laugh, wondering how the Duke of Elvaston could possibly have formed so exaggerated a notion of his consequence.

"I tried to persuade our friend Mr. Gratwycke to meet you here to-day," said the duke, glancing round a dinner-table of thirty people, and half afraid that the party might contain too many fox-hunters to be altogether agreeable to the Indian veteran. "But I fancy he has entirely given up dining out. At least, he would not hear of honouring us at Ormeau."

The colonel replied by a few words in confirmation of the supposition that old Gratwycke had ceased to dine out of his own house; but, while puzzling himself to recollect whether it were gout or chronic rheumatism, or simply that worst of distempers old age, by which poor Grat. had been disabled, his attention was arrested by a question addressed by the Marchioness of Cossington, beside whom he was seated, to his daughter-in-law, who sat nearly opposite.

"My sister Devereux wrote me word, last spring," said she, "that all Rome was running to Gibson's *atelier*, to see a magnificent bust, for which you had sat to him in the character of Diana, the most beautiful of his works! May I inquire whether you have brought over a cast of it? My father is one of Gibson's earliest patrons!"

"Lady Devereux was in some degree mistaken," replied Mrs. Hamilton, greatly embarrassed; but whether at having to give such an explanation before a large party of strangers, or because conscious of guilt in the Henry Hamlyn chapter, the colonel could not determine. "Gibson had an order for a group of Diana and Calisto, from Prince Wirzakin, a Russian noble, who is doing wonders in Italy as a patron of the arts. It occurred to him that my head might serve as a model for his principal figure; and having been a frequent visiter to his *atelier* with Lady Burlington, I was happy to oblige him. Such was the origin of the work. I should scarcely, otherwise, have had the presumption to sit for my bust, in the character of a classical divinity!" added Mrs. Hamilton, with a smile.

"You have told us the *origin* of the work," replied Lady Cossington. "But you must leave it for me to add that this beautiful head, when

finished, excited raptures among the Italians, and that an enormous price was offered for a copy of the bust by the King of Bavaria for the Glyptotheca."

"All this is fine news to *me*, my dear!" cried the colonel, addressing, in his turn, his daughter-in-law. "Why the plague didn't you bring me home a copy of this famous bust? I'm no great judge of the arts; but I'm a warm admirer of the beauties of nature; even where my whole heart is not enlisted in the object, as in the present instance."

"I knew you possessed a miniature of me, sir, and thought it might appear presumption to return to England laden with such a *very* cumbrous trophy!" replied Ellen. And she forthwith entered into conversation with her neighbour Lord Edward Sutton, a younger son of the duke, and travelled man, touching the state of sculpture in Europe, and the high rank maintained by English artists among their Continental brethren. When next the colonel was able to catch a few words of their conversation, she was describing, in language that did justice to the subject, the exquisite statue just completed by Geefs, for the tomb of Malibran at Lacken, which she had visited in her recent transit through Brussels. The unequalled beauty of the spirit of Harmony ascending to its native skies, adorned with all the ethereal grace of that triumphant *chef-d'œuvre*, was aptly described. "I had not before conceived it possible," said Mrs. Hamilton, "to impart to such a substance as marble the action of *soaring*. One knows not which most to admire in this beautiful work, the ecstatic and rapturous expression of the countenance, or the buoyancy of the attitude."

The colonel was disappointed. There was no bringing her back from this to a graduate of Cambridge, or a set of rooms in Trin. Coll.!

In the evening, there was music; music which, to the Italianized ears of Mrs. Hamilton, sounded strangely enough. The Duke of Elvaston and his son were directors of the Ancient Concert and patrons of the Catch Club; and Handel, Purcell, Locke, Scarlatti, Bach, still found favour in their ears. The most modern music tolerated at Ormeau was the graceful shallowness of Mozart, the quips and quirks of Arne, or the tender monotony of Cimarosa.

With Lady Cossington's admirable performance of one or two of Handel's songs Ellen was unfeignedly delighted; but when the worthy duke, his sons, and two or three habitual stagers at Ormeau, betook themselves to violins and violoncellos, and murdered a very learned symphony of Salomon's, she recurred to her Neapolitan evenings of Donizetti, Bellini, and Mercadante with a sigh that borrowed, perhaps, some sadness from the personal reminiscences with which it was connected.

Still, the evening was a very pleasant one. There was a whist-table in an adjoining drawing-room, so as to form no obstacle to the noise of the amateurs, or the conversation of the anti-melodists; among whom was the good colonel, who had actually beguiled Sir Robert Maitland from his favourite Purcell, to talk over Cabool and Dost Mohammed. The two veterans had established themselves in two oldfashioned chairs (which had probably been privy to arguments touching the War of the Succession, and the manœuvres of Dettingen), to fight over the recent Indian campaign; and having this time found a friend to sympathize in his indignation against the policy of the Earl of Clansawney, the colonel could do no less than reward his new ally by bestowing the most patient attention on an account now given by Sir Robert of a system he was pursuing to reclaim a vast tract of land on his estates in the Hebrides, chiefly with a view of bestowing employment upon and preventing the emigration of his Highland tenants.

"I flatter myself we have done wonders!" said the old soldier; "and for these two winters past, I have had the comfort of knowing that sixty or eighty families had warm beds to lie on, and plenty of good food in their stomachs, who, before, had barely rags to cover them or victuals to eat! One sleeps the sounder, my dear Colonel Hamilton, for such a consciousness. However, my agent warns me that I must not go farther than I can feel my way back again. I have had four girls to portion off; and my younger sons have a right to all my hoardings. I am forced, therefore, to crawl, when I would much rather walk. However, I have just received the welcome news of some Bhurtpore prize-money, to be paid off; so there will be joy in Glen Coil, and among the poor fellows at Usk. My daughter Cossington is very angry with me because I talk of going up to town to-morrow to look after it. But as I don't visit London above once in five years, I have no banker there, and only my Edinburgh factors to manage my business for me, who scarcely understand that sort of thing. We are told that the way to have our boots shine is to be our own shoeblacks; so I must even vex poor Flora, and rail it to town."

"I wish to Heaven I'd known it t'other day, when I was in Lon'on!" cried the colonel. "'Twould have been a pleasure for me to look in at the Indy House, or War Office, or wherever you've been referred to. 'Tis a thousand pities to leave this pleasant house and party to do what any honest man might do for you!"

"Why, I should not be sorry to spare myself the journey," replied the veteran. "I have an old wound that is too apt to trouble me if I bestir myself too much in cold weather, which is the reason I'm so seldom able to come south'ard, and visit the girls. However, business must be done."

"By George! I think I could manage it for ye!" cried the colonel, elated by the idea. "I've a right-hand man o' my own, not to say a bosom friend as well as one of the warmest men in the city, who has managed such matters for *me* half a hundred times before."

"Indeed?" cried Sir Robert Maitland, already expanding into the kindest congeniality with his grayheaded brother soldier.

"'Tis one o' the partners in Hamlyn's house; a fellow with a head long enough for a chancellor of the exchequer. At least *I* ought to say as much to a man who secures me five and a half per cent. for my money in times like these."

"Faith! this is indeed a man worth inquiring after," cried Sir Robert. "I have long been in want of some practical man, in London, who could give me a notion, at a pinch, of the state of the money-market. I'm guardian to two dear girls, the orphans of an old Highland neighbour of mine, whose small portions are none the worse for having abided in my hands. But, as they are advancing into womanhood, I sometimes reproach myself for not having done better for them; and by a little management, and a friend at court, I have no doubt I might still make their little sum rounder, before they are marriageable.

This would be a great satisfaction. Suppose, colonel, you give me a line to your wonder-working banker."

"I'll do better than that, if you'll allow me," said Colonel Hamilton. "If you will make my excuses acceptable to the duke, I'll run up to town with you to-morrow (I've taken up the trick o' gadding lately, I think); and we'll go and say our say to Hamlyn, dine at the United Service, look in, if you like, at the pantomime, and be back again to dinner here the following day."

"You take away my breath, my dear sir!" replied Sir Robert, not a little amused at his impetuosity. "Though some years your junior, I'm not quite up to such electric movements! However, throw me in another four-and-twenty hours into the errand, and I'm your man, and most gratefully. You are here, I know, till Monday. Leave your charming daughter-in-law, without fear or anxiety, to the care of Flora. I will go and talk it over with Lady Cossington and the duchess."

Colonel Hamilton was, in fact, far from regretting an excuse for a second journey to town, without having to leave Ellen alone at the Manor. Highly as he prized her society, it did not altogether console him for the loss of Mrs. Hamlyn's severe and subdued companionship. The loftiness of character revealed in the thoughtful brow of his daughter-in-law often repressed upon his lips those familiar pleasantries which were sure to find an echo in Lydia's girlish laugh, or meet with smiling indulgence from her mother. He wanted to see them both again. He wanted to congratulate Mrs. Hamlyn on the submission of her son Henry, and ascertain whether the young Cantab had been more frank with her in his avowal of acquaintance with Ellen than Ellen to himself of her intimacy with *him*.

Between a friendly visit to Cavendish Square, and a business visit to Lombard-street, his little excursion to the metropolis was likely to be exclusively devoted to the Hamlyns.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Such men are dangerous."
SHAKSPEARE.

RICHARD HAMLYN was, as it has been already asserted, as absolute in his firm as Richard Cœur de Lion at the head of his army. His nominal partner had not crossed the threshold of the counting-house for years; and over his subordinates, the active partner exercised all the influence arising from a character of the highest integrity, and eminent ability as a man of business. For the probity of the counter is distinguishing as the honour of knightly spurs; and the pen of Hamlyn the banker was glorious as the lance of Bayard.

Whenever a hitch occurred in the progress of business, the clerk in perplexity had only to ask five minutes' conversation with the head of the house, and all was unravelled, the funds in demand were forthcoming, and the question in suspense decided.

Few bankers' clerks have leisure to inquire more curiously into the private affairs of their principals than regards the due payment of their salaries and the replenishment of the till. All that the establishment in Lombard-street knew or cared to know about those of the Hamlyns, was, that they were very opulent people, whose wealth, aided by the strong and speculative mind of Richard, was always on the increase; and the quill-drivers were accordingly happy, overbearing, and self-sufficient, as it becomes the clerkhood of a thriving house to be.

Still, there was one among them, Spilsby (the baldheaded clerk, to whom the "widder o' John Darley, o' Lemon-Tree Yard," had been turned over by his master), who had a somewhat shrewder eye and more calculating mind than the rest. To *him* there were peculiarities in Mr. Hamlyn's mode of keeping the accounts. There were evidences of mistrust in his mode of receiving the dividends and disposing of the securities of the house, unsatisfactory to one who conceived that nearly twenty years of diligent service ought to have placed him nearer on a level with the head or heart of his employer.

His suspicions on these points once awakened, he had no hesitation in profiting by the facilities afforded by his situation to pursue a variety of trifling investigations to which he had never hitherto given a moment's attention; or, rather, to which, had he been on more confidential terms with his master, he would not have permitted himself to direct his notice more than comported with his duty to the firm. But, on the very first occasion of his placing his finger on one of the suspected spots, Mr. Hamlyn had taken him up so haughtily, and imposed upon him so vexatious and difficult an account to wind up, in order to direct his attention elsewhere, that Spilsby, instead of being grieved that the firm should have occasion to condescend to artifices, and zealous to assist their temporizing, was resolved to wait with patience, but pursue with perseverance, the substantiation of his suspicions.

But the mistrust of Richard Hamlyn was now also awakened. He had not the slightest doubt the head-clerk was more than half aware that all was not well with the concern; and his agony of anxiety to discover to what extent Spilsby was enlightened, was torture indeed! Every day, as he passed through the banking-house, his first glance was directed towards the baldheaded clerk. Every evening, when they left off business, his first care, when the keys were delivered to him, was to examine the eyes of Spilsby, to discover whether anything had transpired—whether a triumphant expression gleamed under his overhanging brows—or whether despondency depressed the corners of his mouth. A domestic traitor, such as this, was a million of times more to be dreaded than the Italian gossipings of Ellen Hamilton and Sir Roger Burlington's widow.

As is usual in such cases, the object of apprehension soon became aware of his power. Though unable to penetrate to the root of the matter, or surmise the exact source of the irregularities which placed his employer in fear of investigation, Spilsby saw that he had, at any moment, the means of discomposing the self-possession of Mr. Hamlyn, by a certain dry sneer, accompanying his manifesto of the prosperous state of their assets. He had only to fix his eye searchingly and insolently on his master, when announcing a large deposite, to render Richard Hamlyn's countenance infirm, and his answers incoherent.

All this was anguish to the banker. His pride in Lombard-street autocracy was altogether destroyed. He could not stir, speak, write, move, but he fancied himself under the surveillance of

Spilsby. During the private conversations held in his back-room, he always pictured to himself the ear of the baldheaded clerk affixed to the keyhole; and when alone with him, sometimes felt inspired with a gladiator-like desire to spring upon him and crush out of the offender's breast the extent of his knowledge and detections. He lost his cool shrewdness and common powers of calculation whenever Spilsby was present. With the eye of the baldheaded clerk fixed upon him, Hamlyn was no longer able to combine the mysteries of Austrian Scrip and London Omnium. Othello's occupation was gone!

Meanwhile, every step of self-possession ceded by the banker was a step of advance to Spilsby. The life of the clerk became one of prying and groping, surmise and scrutiny. At one moment he fancied he had discovered an immense deficiency in the Exchequer securities of the firm. But the trap had been laid for him by Hamlyn, in order to determine whether he were or were not engaged in investigating the private affairs of his employers; and no sooner had he hinted, with due deprecation, his fears that Mr. Hamlyn had been made the victim of some knavery, than the banker quietly produced the missing securities, and knew as well how to interpret the crest-fallen surprise of Spilsby as he had before interpreted his ill-disguised and contemptuous exultation.

From that moment the baldheaded clerk became stern in his purpose of detection. He saw that his suspicions had been understood and frustrated by the superior cunning of his employer; and from his knowledge of the determined character of Hamlyn, was satisfied that he would spare no pains to destroy the man who had dared uplift the veil concealing his gangrened member. It had, in short, become a strife for life or death of character between the two. Though retaining towards each other the external courtesies becoming their mutual position, the looks of each spoke daggers. They often conversed together smilingly of the weather, when each was thoroughly aware that the other would willingly denounce him to the world—the law—the jail—the hangman!

Such was the intimate position of the man who was entertaining ambassadors and home secretaries at his table, and commanding the cheers of the House of Commons!

It was after enduring, as he would have borne the fangs of a rattlesnake, the furtive glances of Spilsby, while passing through the counting-house to his private room, at his usual early hour, one fine morning in February, that Richard Hamlyn, on seating himself before his desk to examine a file of letters marked private, and a series of slips sent in for inspection for the cashier, sank back in his chair, incapable of giving his attention to the smallest of these documents; so deeply was he moved by the poisonous smile which had traversed the face of Spilsby, on perceiving his entrance. Like Haman, he would willingly have issued orders at that moment for the construction of a gibbet fifty cubits high, to exterminate the Mordecai of his abhorrence.

At that moment a card was sent in to him requiring attention. Miss Cresswell, for the last ten years the governess of his daughters, and for the last six months absent, on leave, with her family in Ireland (at the express entreaty of Colonel Hamilton), having just arrived in town by the mail, had thought proper to wait upon her patron in the city, believing the family to be still at Dean Park, for instructions and greeting on her road; that is, for rudiments of instruction in the financial line, in return for all the geography and use of the globes she had lavished on Lydia and Harriet. To accord the interview requested, was no gratuitous sacrifice on the part of the banker; for poor Miss Cresswell had been one of the most passive instruments in his hands, regarding him, in the awestruck veneration of her heart, as a politician little inferior to Metternich, and a financier superior to all the Rothschilds of all the capitals in Europe. By long experience, therefore, Mr. Hamlyn was aware that he could silence her by a word, and dismiss her by a nod.

But he was not prepared for the changes effected in an Irish nature by a renewal of the cordialities of an Irish home! The poor little dependant, so long refrigerated by the proprieties of Cavendish Square, was now thawed into a human being. For six whole months the humble governess had been thinking and feeling for herself, till, at the last, "she spoke with her tongue." Hamlyn would very much rather she would have held it; for he was ill prepared, just then, to bear with idle talking. He was in no humour for her rhapsodies, scarcely even in a humour for her gratitude. The arrival, at that moment, of the fussy little woman, excited by the prospect of rejoining her beloved pupils, was like the importunate buzzing of a gnat round the head of a traveller who is lying on his guard in ambush against the attack of a lion.

"The kindness you have always shown me, sir," said she, after a long preamble about hoping to have merited his esteem and good opinion by her conscientious devotion to the care of the minds, morals, manners (geography and the use of the globes included), of his daughters, "imboldens me to intrude upon your valuable time, with a few questions relating to interests exclusively my own. Mr. Joseph Cresswell, my uncle, sir (I fancy I have before apprized you that I have an uncle an eminent legal practitioner, that is, a thriving attorney in Limerick), has always been in the habit of receiving and investing the amount of my stipend, transmitted through your hands, sir, to his credit in Latouche's bank. These little savings, sir, thanks to your generosity and the indulgence with which Mrs. Hamlyn favours my prudent parsimony by her disregard to—"

Hamlyn groaned in spirit at the prolixity of the professional phrase-maker.

"In short, sir," resumed Miss Cresswell, perceiving his impatience, "I am now mistress of a sum little short of one thousand pounds—a considerable one, indeed, when it is considered that I came into your house a penniless young woman, with nothing to depend upon but my own industry and abilities for my future support in life. I ask your pardon for detaining you, sir, but I am coming to the point. My uncle is advancing in years, and being about to dispose of his business, has suggested it to me that (the various members of my family being far better off than myself) I should sink the little capital in question in a life annuity."

"A very prudent suggestion!" observed the banker, still seeing before him, interposed between his eyes and the little prim, skinny face of Miss Cresswell, the significant smile and penetrating eyes of the clerk, so that the phantom almost deprived him of his reasoning powers.

"My uncle Joseph assures me, sir, that this sort of business is more practicable, that is, more *securely* practicable in London; that a word from you to your man of business would procure me some favourable occasion for a safe investment; and, as a preparatory step to the proposition, he is desirous of remitting to you, for my benefit, the whole amount of the small sum in question. If, therefore, I am not taking too great a liberty—"

"My dear madam, there is no service in my power to render you which you have not the fullest right to claim at my hands," said Hamlyn, much relieved, and in his blandest accents. "Your inestimable services to my daughters, your judicious watchfulness over their education, entitles you to my utmost gratitude and respect." Then, as if satisfied that he had repaid her, sentence for sentence, fudge by fudge, he drew forth from the blotting-book a quire of official-looking note-paper, and indited to his solicitor, Mr. Crossman, of the firm of Crossman and Slack, of New Norfolk-street, a recommendation of the bearer to his utmost consideration, and begging that the professional services rendered her might be placed to his own account.

This act of munificence, if probably intended as a *bouquet d'adieu* to curtail the somewhat lengthy negotiations of the prolix wholesale dealer in Lindley Murray's Entire, failed of effect. Under the influence of relief from the oppression of six-and-eightpences to an amount untold, poor Miss Cresswell burst forth into benedictions and rejoicings still more diffuse.

"This generosity is no more than I might have expected, sir," said she, "from your father's son. My uncle Joseph was saying to me the other day (when congratulating me on my good fortune in maintaining for so many years my place in your establishment and good opinion), that, when he had occasion to visit the English metropolis, on business, thirty years ago, the name of Walter Hamlyn was a by-word for all that was distinguished in worth, probity, and intelligence. My poor uncle, sir, had once a money transaction with the late Mr. Hamlyn, which left an ineffaceable impression on his mind. Nearly about the same time he had an audience of the late Mr. Pitt, and declares that, of the two, Mr. Hamlyn, of Lombard-street, struck him as by far the most competent man of the two."

Longer the governess would have spoken, and far longer would Hamlyn have listened; for praise bestowed upon the name and memory of his father was, in his ears, as the charming of the charmer. Filial reverence constituted the sole redeeming virtue of his life; and no sooner did Miss Cresswell treat of the late banker as superior to Mr. Pitt, than he began to regard *her* as superior to Miss Edgeworth. But at that moment, the face of Spilsby, the real, substantial Spilsby, peered into the room, requesting to speak with Mr. Hamlyn.

There was nothing unusual in his voice or aspect; yet such was the nervous trepidation of Hamlyn under existing influences, that he seemed to hear in those simple words a mysterious denunciation.

"Mrs. Hamlyn is expecting you every moment in Cavendish Square, where I shall have the pleasure of seeing you this evening," said he, by way of dismissal to the governess, who instantly gathered up her gloves, velvet bag, and umbrella, for a hasty exit; on which Spilsby no longer hesitated to acquaint the agitated banker that "Colonel Hamilton and a gentleman were waiting for him without."

Inexpressibly relieved, Hamlyn desired they might be instantly shown in; then, ere there was time for the execution of his order, hurried into the counting-house, with outspread hands, to welcome the most highly valued of his friends, and receive an introduction to Sir Robert Maitland. Another moment and all three were seated in the banker's room; where Colonel Hamilton, with his usual aptitude for rushing in *medias res*, was already in the midst of his Ormeau chapter of politics and finance.

"If you've heard lately from Watty, you didn't expect to see me here to-day, I calculate, my dear Hamlyn?" cried he. "You scarcely fancied me likely to leave my quarters in a land overflowing with milk and honey, to run up care-crazing to Lon'on, to break my head against your strong boxes! But I've brought you a friend, that is, a good customer, which is the best kind o' friend—who wants you to put him in the way you put all the rest of us, of finding five-and-twenty shillings in a guinea."

Richard Hamlyn, at present ignorant with whom he had to deal in the stranger, and scarcely hoping that Providence would supply him with a second open-handed old soldier knowing no more of business than a cartouch-box, felt rather nervous at the effect these preposterous announcements might have on his new client; and, accordingly, began inquiring after the health of Mrs. Robert Hamilton, with a view of eliciting general particulars respecting his visiter.

The attempt prospered. While the stranger assisted Colonel Hamilton in replying to the banker, by allusions to the care of his daughter, Lady Cossington, under which Mrs. Hamilton was residing at Ormeau Castle, Hamlyn was enchanted to find that he had to deal with Sir Robert Maitland.

Few things would have gratified him more than the notice of the Duke and Duchess of Elvaston, as a set-off to the insolence of the Hyde. Under the fosterage of Ormeau, he might still look down upon Barlow of Alderham, defy Gratwycke of Gratwycke, and stand his ground against the united squirearchy of the county. Nothing, in short, more desirable to him than the acquaintance of the stranger, by obliging whom it was possible to secure the gratitude of Lady Cossington, and the future favour of the Elvastons.

By the time Sir Robert had half explained his views, Hamlyn was taking down notes of his Bhurtpoor claims, suggesting a certificate, by affidavit, of his life, a power of attorney entitling Hamlyn and Co. to receive, and undertaking to manage the whole business for him at the several periods at which the prize-money was to be made payable to the claimants.

The money-interests of Sir Robert's wards were considered with equal alacrity; the question of the reclaimed lands with deferential interest.

"I perfectly remember the bill for the sea-enclosures of Glen Coil being brought before the House," said Mr. Hamlyn. "I was even on the Committee for the Improvement and Benefit of the Western Islands, in which the amelioration of the Maitland estates was brought under the notice of Parliament. Your factor, a Mr. M'Causley, a very superior man, was examin-

ed; and infinite credit did he do both to himself and his employer."

"God bless my soul! to think of your having been present at poor M'Causley's examination, of which I have since heard no end!" exclaimed Sir Robert. "A most curious coincidence, my dear Colonel Hamilton! How little I imagined that your friend, Mr. Hamlyn, had ever heard mention of my poor fellows at Glen Coil! Well, to be sure, the ramifications of business, in this commercial country, are a most astounding thing!"

"I remember deeply regretting at the time, my dear sir," resumed the banker, with increased and increasing suavity, "that I had not the honour of your acquaintance, or that of some member of your family, in order to suggest to you the feasibility and great advantage to all parties of establishing at Usk a company not only for the burning of kelp, but for the manufacture of iodine, on the Königsburg system—a mineral the value and importance of which is becoming daily more appreciated in Great Britain and the British colonies."

The two old soldiers were becoming every moment more impressed by the legislative perspicacity of the banker; who now proceeded to examine and cross-examine Sir Robert Maitland touching the nature and capabilities of his Highland property; till the veteran began almost to fancy that the nest-egg he had been keeping so snug for the benefit of the more impoverished portion of his clan, was a golden egg at the least; and that he should be a goose unless he brooded it with the steadiest incubation.

Suddenly interrupting himself, as if recalling to mind, on mention of Bhurtpoor, the interest experienced by the two soldiers in the affairs of India, he asked leave to examine one of the letters marked private and confidential, which was lying on his table when he arrived; the handwriting of which apprized him that it proceeded from an individual occupying a place of trust in the India House, to whom he paid large *douceurs* for priority of information on the arrival of the mails; and, lo! as he had ardently hoped might prove the case, the letter in his hand announced most important intelligence, only to be made public in the evening papers. Both Colonel Hamilton and Sir Robert were enraptured. They were of an age when public news acquires threefold importance. Old men, in proportion as their participation in wordly pleasures slackens, seem to take double delight in tidings of sieges, insurrections, earthquakes, treaties, or declarations of war, as if conscious that the night is approaching when no man shall work; that a time is at hand when even the "Times" newspaper shall manœuvre its columns for them in vain.

Ere their glee had abated at hearing of a petty victory on the borders of Tâtary, important only as likely to raise the price of consols from 74¾ to 74¼, Hamlyn expressed his earnest desire that, instead of returning into the country by the four o'clock train as they threatened, now that their business was accomplished, they would do him the honour of dining with him in Cavendish Square. He expected a few friends, he said—one or two remarkably pleasant men. It would afford him sincere pleasure to enable these gentlemen to make an acquaintance so interesting to all the friends of humanity, as that of Sir Robert Maitland, of Glen Coil.

The old general was almost bewitched by such flattering unction of adulation; and the colonel desired no better. For they had arrived late the preceding evening, and as yet accomplished none of their projects in London, except dining at the club, and looking in at the pantomime; and Colonel Hamilton was really anxious for a little private conversation with his friend, the banker's wife, ere he returned to the country.

The consent of both, therefore, was readily obtained.

"Upon my life, I never met with a pleasanter or more sensible man!" exclaimed Sir Robert, as they drove back to the West End.

"A very *remarkable* man, sir—a man of such general information! A son in the Blues, I think you say? Glad to hear it! One of the finest regiments in the service! I like to see a man who has been grinding down his own life and spirits at the desk, have the pluck to put his boy into a crack regiment, to wear triumphantly in the world the trophies of his father's humbler labours. I'm pleased at the thoughts of our dinner, my dear colonel. It has not often fallen in my way to be behind the scenes of Mr. Hamlyn's order of society. I shall be really glad to witness the domestic life of so important a body as the mercantile aristocracy of this commercial metropolis."

Had Lord Dartford been present, he would certainly have rewarded with a "hear, hear, hear!" the pompous manifesto of the worthy old general, who had scarcely an idea beyond the horizon of the Highlands. But even the marquis would have admitted it to be singular enough, that at half-past seven that day, Lieutenant-general Sir Robert Maitland, K.C.B., should be accompanying to dinner to a house he had never entered before, a friend of whose existence he had been ignorant three days preceding. Such, however, was the familiarizing charm attached to the *bonhommie* of Colonel Hamilton, that nothing seemed strange in the arrangements to any of the parties concerned.

They were the first to arrive, for the colonel was eager to shake hands with Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter; and while he entered eagerly into conversation in a low voice with the former, touching the news she was receiving from Cambridge, Sir Robert good-naturedly replied to Lydia's inquiries concerning the recent news of the Ormeau hounds, and the sport enjoyed by her brother. She said nothing, of course, of that enjoyed by the Marquis of Dartford; but as the two young men were now seldom a hundred yards asunder, it was probable that all that was good for Peter, in her solicitudes, was also good for Paul.

The banker, unprepared for the premature visit of his new acquaintance, and having arrived late from the House of Commons, to which he had made a hurried visit in the interim, appeared in the drawing-room just as the carriage of the succeeding comer drove up to the door; and Sir Robert, while shaking hands with his agreeable host, now transformed from the seedy city drudge into the well-dressed, smiling, assiduous man of the world, fully anticipated from the bustle the announcement of some brother-merchant—some Baring, Robarts, Smith, Drummond, or Hoare. But, to his great surprise, the guest announced was one of the leading members of the Tory cabinet! Lord Crawley shortly followed. Then came Flimflam, the reviewer, by way of sippet to the ragout; then,

the Earl of Harringford, a nobleman who might have worn a professor's gown had he not been born to a peer's robes; then, the Earl and Countess of Rotherwood; and, lastly, two men rarely seen out of the House of Commons—one of them a learned lawyer, whom Flimflam accused of living within the rules of the Temple, and only being suffered to go out by a day-rule.

The K.C.B. was a little surprised. He could almost have fancied himself in the lordly circle of Ormeau, except that he soon heard the arts and sciences, and politics, which, though neither an art nor science, possess the power of crushing and extinguishing them all, discussed under the banker's roof with fifty times the *connaissance de cause* that ever enlightened such arguments at the table of his grace the father-in-law of his daughter. Sir Robert Maitland began to discover that bankers of London were a race as distinct from the bankers of the "gude town" as Highlanders from Lowlanders; or that they had altered strangely during his absence from England, fighting her battles in the peninsulas of India and Spain.

Still less could he have imagined himself at the table of the Duke of Elvaston, when they arrived in the dining-room. Hamlyn, like all who have their way to make in society, was a professed dinner-giver, and studied the vocation as a science.

On *his* refined board, the lordly sirloin, so dear to the Duke of Elvaston and Sir Roger de Coverley, would have been out of place. But his fish course had been pronounced by the greatest epicure extant to be the most perfect in London; and the finest of the many fine gentlemen who honoured Walter Hamlyn with their company had been heard to say, that, though there might be finer plate and a vaster *locale* at D—— House, S—— House, or B—— House, nothing could exceed the elegant *savoir vivre* of Cavendish Square. It was the very boudoir of the temple of gastronomy.

Sir Robert, as became his age and calling, was fond of a good glass of wine, and fancied that the cellars at Ormeau afforded him glorious occasion for the indulgence of such a taste. But he now found himself nonplussed. Claret was no longer Claret, nor Burgundy Burgundy; so various was the nomenclature, and so numerous the flavours under which each of his favourite wines pretended to recommend itself to his notice! He found that even Moselle was a house divided against itself; and that Champagne, like man, in its time played many parts—

> Wearing strange shapes, and bearing many names.

But the old man was not partial to innovations; and the iced pineapple water, handed round between the courses, was, in his opinion, a wretched substitute for the lime-punch of his own Glasgow; and when the dessert came on table, the difficulty of deciding between the reality of the iced-cream fruits lying cold and deceptious on their napkins, and the splendid prize-fruit, fresh from the forcing houses of Dean Park, put him out of conceit even with the gigantic strawberries and cherries before him.

Meanwhile, pleasant greetings had taken place between Lord Crawley and the old worthy of Burlington Manor, who was not slow to claim the congratulations of the Home Secretary on the early verification of his predictions respecting the Indian war.

"I own I agreed with you in believing that the thing was nearly over," replied his lordship, gayly, "seeing that the newspaper-press had taken to designating it as 'interminable.' Ever while you live, mistrust the cut-and-dry phrases of leading articles, which are mere tubs for the whale. The 'designs of Russia,' for instance! For the last thirty years have these phrase-merchants been accusing Russia of 'designs!' Russia, whose policy is the coarsest, most peremptory, and most insolently straightforward in the world! As if, were Russia cunning enough to *have* designs, she would not be shrewd enough to prevent their becoming the fable of Europe!"

"Perhaps," interposed Flimflam, "she may be aware of the advantages of a bad reputation, and assume the part of a plotter in order to disconcert the machinations of other cabinets; just as people circulate reports at Christmas of having the typhus fever or smallpox in their country neighbourhood, to discourage the intended visits of their friends."

Sir Robert gazed with amazement on the little man, whom he alone of all the party did not know to be a professional diner-out, engaged, like the pyrotechnist of a public fête, for the discharge of squibs and crackers; and, taking Flimflam's assertion to the letter, expressed a doubt that might have become the lips of my uncle Toby, whether there existed a true-born Englishman capable of inhospitality so flagrant. This was glorious to the wit, who thereby earned an anecdote of provincial simplicity to be retailed at his next dinner-party; embellishing, of course, the simple assertion of the general with a broad Scotch accent, that would have made the fortune of a low comedian at the Surrey theatre.

Perceiving by this *sortie*, and the spirit with which it was backed by Colonel Hamilton, that there were country gentlemen at table, Flimflam now put forth the strength which often failed him in company with men of Lord Crawley's shrewdness and knowledge of the world, of the technical memory of the clever Templar, who was apt to place people somewhat unceremoniously in the witness-box, and the grave ratiocinaciousness of the Earl of Harringford, who reduced all things, from a new mineral to a new pun, to analysis and demonstration. Assuming, from that moment, his *real* part in the play, which was that of an indifferent mezzotint copy of the great Sidney Smith, satisfied to retail in society not frequented by the clerical wit the pungencies which told all the better for the *aplomb* with which they were rehearsed by the stepfather of the joke.

"I suppose you heard what Sidney Smith said the other night?" was, however, as fair-dealing an indication of the source of his *bon-mots*, as the name of Cousins or Doo inscribed on the corner of one of Lawrence's or Wilkie's pictures, as circulated print-wise through millions of hands, by comparison with the treasured original; and people like the Rotherwoods were as thankful to the dapper little gentleman who procured them an opportunity of hearing what "Mr. Smith had said so amusingly about the island of Hong Kong," as to the martyr who sleeps in a leathern suit at the tops of trees in Mexico to preserve himself from beasts and reptiles of prey, in order to provide orchideous plants for the conservatories of lords and ladies.

All this time, while the two old soldiers sat listening open-mouthed to the echoed facetiæ of what they conceived to be a revived edition of

Mr. Joseph Miller, Hamlyn was noting, unnoticed, the countenance of Lord Crawley, from whom, for the first time in the course of their political acquaintance, he had written the preceding day to ask a favour. From his long experience in deciphering the hieroglyphics of the human countenance, the banker fancied he should be able to foresee as readily as the teller of a division the "ay" or "no" of the official, in the courtly smile assumed to cover a negative, or the forced unconcern purporting to neutralize the dignity of conferring a favour. Between the Plombières and its accompanying glass of Malmsey, Richard Hamlyn flattered himself that the intentions of the Home Secretary would betray themselves.

Nevertheless, the practised Crawley ate, drank, and digested, with a face as inexpressive as a whited wall; and Lord Harringford might as well have attempted to work a problem upon the constellated dried cherries on the surface of the Nesselrode pudding before him, as the anxious solicitor to infer anything concerning the success of his suit from the blank countenance of the great man.

Nor were matters more lucent when the ladies and servants disappeared. The circle narrowed, and the jokes grew broader. The two officials whispered together, the templar grew strong and pungent as a summer radish, the Earl of Harringford snored, and Colonel Hamilton and Sir Robert Maitland mentally whispered their regrets that the real Simon Pure, the *editio princeps* of Sidney Smith, had not been laid before them that day, instead of the flimsy fellow who represented him much as the fiddle and harp mangling one of Rossini's overtures for the distraction of the passengers in a Ramsgate steamer represent the orchestra of Her Majesty's Theatre. Yet still Hamlyn made no advance in his discoveries; and, with his usual tact, exerted himself to prose plausibly on, through a long series of social truisms and political surfaceisms, as a man is privileged to do at the head of his own table, in order to disguise his watchfulness; trusting that, while assisting the digestion of the Earl of Rotherwood by the emission of a dulcet morality such as daily forwarded his lordship's evening nap at Rotherwood Castle, under the care of his domestic chaplain, he might also catch Lord Crawley napping by throwing him off his guard.

If unsuccessful in this object, his eloquence was not wholly thrown away. The colonel and the general listened with their eyes, ears, and mouths; and at the close of every neatly-turned sentence, nodded approvingly to each other, as much as to say, "With such men as *this* in Parliament, how can the affairs of the country go amiss! Long live the Conservative interest and the Constitution! Long live Church and State, army and navy, the queen and the British Grenadiers!"

"*There's* a head to settle a frontier treaty for you!" murmured Colonel Hamilton to Sir Robert, who had been tasting a fifth kind of claret.

"*There's* a conscience to intrust with our lives and liberties, our consols and exchequer-bills!" was the rejoinder, or thereabout, of the K.C.B., who was topping up with curaçoa. And by the time they reached the drawing-room, both were in that mood of ineffable content produced by the digestion of a dinner too perfect to engender remorse in the stomach by the fumes of the mellowest of wine and mildest of sophistry. At that moment, had either of them had in his pocket twenty thousand lacs of rupees for investment, he would have placed it in the hands of Hamlyn the banker with as little hesitation as in those of St. Paul.

By the peculiar manner in which Lord Crawley looked about him as they traversed the hall to go to coffee, as if to ascertain that his great-coat and servants were in attendance for immediate departure so soon as he should have made his bow to his hostess, Hamlyn perceived that there was some serious call on the time of the minister; that he was going either to a cabinet council or the opera. Hoping to nail him as they proceeded together up stairs, while Hamilton and Maitland paused to admire a princely stand of exotics on the landing-place, he attempted to enter into conversation.

"Flimflam was not as good as usual to-day!" said he, in the apologetic tone in which a host alludes to a bottle of corked claret. "Flimflam never *tells* in a party where he has no confederate to whom to throw the ball. He requires a chum, just as a juggler requires his clown. Flimflam cannot carry off a party on his single shoulders."

"I believe he is an able man in his profession," observed Lord Crawley, vacantly, attaching no more importance to a man so politically uninfluential as Flimflam than to Ramsay the butler. Then, as they entered the drawing-room together, he drew off his host towards an inner boudoir, where a fire was blazing, and the caricatures of H. B. lying scattered, for the recreation of loungers; aware that a *tête-à-tête* in which one of the *têtes* is that of a secretary of state, is as sacred from intrusion as the *tête-à-tête* of a pair of engaged lovers.

"I need not tell you, my dear Hamlyn," said he, opening the palaver in an off-hand way, "that I gave immediate attention to the object of your letter of yesterday. I am half inclined to quarrel with you, by-the-way, that the first thing you have ever asked me to attempt for you should lie so thoroughly out of my department as to afford any possibility of failure. Consulships, as you are well aware, lie wholly at the disposal of the Foreign Office. Nevertheless, as you justly observed in your note, my interference might exercise a secondary influence; and I therefore lost no time in addressing myself to my noble colleague. I need not remind you, however, that we are obliged to observe excessive punctilio in this sort of interference, or the patronage of no office would be sacred."

"Believe me, I am most sensible of your kindness," replied Hamlyn, satisfied that a consulship asked for by her majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department was as good as granted.

"Not at all, my dear sir! You have claims upon the courtesy of government, independent of the still warmer ties of private friendship which unite you with myself!" replied Lord Crawley, with a becoming recollection of the number of braces of pheasants he had bagged at Dean Park, and looking as benignant as became so high an official. "As far as regards my own feelings, I need not tell you that any request of yours, in *my* power to grant, would be granted *unconditionally*. But, as I said before, this thing is entirely and absolutely out of my department."

"The application, then, was unsuccessful?" inquired Hamlyn, in a low voice, feeling as if

all the claret and grapes he had been swallowing were suddenly acidulating within him.

"Unsuccessful is scarcely the word. Encumbered as the hands of her majesty's government are at the present moment, by long-existing pledges and serious obligations—"

Hamlyn's hopes sunk lower and lower at this plausible preamble. Already he felt in his eyes the dust about to be thrown into them by ministerial circumlocution.

"Encumbered as we are, I say, and forced, as it were, to divide by a miracle five barley-loaves and three small fishes among a hungering multitude, it becomes impossible for us to consider our several leanings and inclinations. When reminded of this by my friend, the foreign secretary, I did not fail to put forward your claims as a zealous supporter of the administration, as well as the least importunate of our parliamentary succours. I leave you to guess what was his reply."

"I fear I am too little skilled in the mysteries of patronage to conjecture!" observed the crestfallen banker.

"Nay, there was no political trickery in it. All was as straightforward as if issuing from your Temple of the Mammon of unrighteousness, Threadneedle-street. His lordship's policy is as practical as Lear's—'nothing for nothing!' In one word, he told me that it was reported we had everything to fear from you on the foreign securities' question; and that, in the event of your petition being granted, we must have your pledge to support this as well as all other government measures."

Richard Hamlyn was conscious of an involuntary clinching of his hands as he listened. The measure in question (to which, with the fear of a treasury prosecution before our eyes, a fictitious name and nature has been assigned) was one of his political pets, the only point on which he differed from the views of the party with which he was as closely amalgamated as a Smyrna fig to the fellow-figs in its drum, because the only political question that happened to hedge upon his private interests. He had cultivated it as a favourite plant; watered it, pruned it, supported it with sticks. Whenever it was before the House, he felt inspired; and it was in the maintenance of this darling measure that he had indulged in those ebullitions of petulance to which allusion was formerly made. In city meetings, composed of the friends of its policy, he was invariably called into the chair. It was *his* department, as much as Ireland is that of O'Connell, factory martyrdom of Lord Ashley, or quarantine of Tydus Pooh-pooh! To abjure, to recant, was as for Peter to deny his master; and with a sense of magnanimity he had not experienced since he last figured on the Barsthorpe hustings as "Hamlyn, the friend of the poor," he prepared to reject the flagitious proposition of government, and renounce the consulship of Tangier.

At that moment, however, there rose up clear and distinct before him, as the spectrum said to haunt the solitude of a late premier, a human head, a bald head, the head of Spilsby, the clerk; producing in that warm and elegant chamber a far more glacial effect than the death's-head of the Egyptian feasts! To rid himself of the haunting of such a presence, he felt that he would have renounced all that Faustus is said to have assigned away by post-orbit, to the Evil One of old.

Another minute, and the bargain was struck. Virtue was gone out of the banker, and the disposal of one of her majesty's richest consulships in his hands.

"This office is, I presume, to be filled by some near relative of your own, since you attach so much importance to it?" said Lord Crawley, inwardly chuckling, as Delilah had done while beholding the strength of her victim cut off, and lying scattered at her feet.

"It is for one who has served me and my family faithfully for a period of twenty years!" responded the banker; and Crawley, whose word was pledged whether this faithful servant happened to be Ramsay the banker's butler or one of his coach-horses, felt a little anxious for farther information.

Though unaddicted to the weakness of astonishment, he was greatly surprised to find his friend Hamlyn of so humane a disposition as to be content to sacrifice the valuable services of the faithfullest head-clerk in the universe to the desire of procuring him an independence. Attributing the Downing-street policy of "Nothing for nothing," even to the unministerial residue of the human race, he could not help surmising that the future consul must have rendered inordinate services to the banker, to suggest such excess of self-sacrifice!

The equivalent, however, whatever it might be, was no affair of *his*. If the future consul of Tangier had withdrawn *his* opposition from some Lombard-street measure, promising for the future to keep his long speeches against the question in his pocket, and himself out of the chair, the balance of counting-house power and obligation was no affair of the Home Office. With emulsive urbanity, therefore, he now took leave; and the two old soldiers, who had been watching the interview through the folding-doors, could scarcely restrain their reverence for the banker, whose opinion Lord Crawley had evidently been sifting with deference, and whom they half surmised had received offers of office, the chancellorship of the exchequer, for aught they knew to the contrary.

While glancing round the drawing-room, so much more splendidly furnished than that of Ormeau, and allowing their eyes to rest at last upon the grave, mild, Canning-looking man of whom the home secretary was so gratefully pressing the hand at parting, they felt proud of human nature and themselves, that merit and worth should find so noble a level, in the first commercial country in the universe! Ahem!

That night was the very longest to Richard Hamlyn he had ever spent, save the 16th of December every year, ere he was sixteen years of age, when breaking up for the Christmas holydays was depending on the daybreak of the morrow. Ere the cheeping of those callow blackbirds, the London chimney-sweeps, had commenced in the streets, he was astir, and for the first time in his life chided the groom in charge of his cabriolet for announcing himself to be at the door two minutes and a half *after* the half hour!

Unapt as he was to indulge in pleasantries, fain would he have parodied Imogen's invocation with

"Oh! for a cab with wings,

to bear me in its sides to Lombard-street!"

Vainly did poor Miss Creswell apply for a few minutes' interview, prior to his departure, in order to acquaint him with the result of her

conference in New-Norfolk-street, the preceding day. Unable to express to the decorous governess the indecorous wish that rose to his lips, concerning a journey he sincerely wished to send her at that moment, he contented himself with graciously begging to postpone their interview to the evening.

"Oh! that Strand! that long, long Strand, with its coal-carts, wagons, drays, its intrusive churches thrusting themselves forward, like highwaymen, to arrest the passenger; its Temple Bar, its thousand of meaningless incumbrances. Never had he felt the throng and pressure of Fleet-street so importunate as that morning. His breath was oppressed; his heart almost ceased to beat under the shifting greatness of his emotions.

At length he stopped before his own door; and the groom accustomed to deposite him there three hundred and eleven days in the year, could scarcely understand how it happened that the banker omitted his usual parting phrase of, "You will be here at half past four." *He* could not surmise that there was no such thing for his master, at that moment, as time or place; that he knew not Lombard-street from Cavendish Square, or four o'clock post meridian from four o'clock ante.

Nevertheless, Richard Hamlyn contrived to subdue his outward mien to a degree of decency becoming the occasion. He entered the counting-house with the same air he would have assumed in entering the Ovington Infirmary, or Ovington Church on Christmas day, or the library of Ormeau, at any time of the year; an humble consciousness of the power of doing good attenuating his habitually grave countenance.

Five minutes afterward, instead of waiting for the ordinary torturing knock and intrusion of the baldheaded clerk, he coolly desired one of the quill-driving subs, who brought in his silver standish duly replenished, to acquaint Mr. Spilsby he wished to speak with him; and when Spilsby came, and beheld the banker standing on the hearth-rug, with his coat-tails upturned, master of himself, and apparently about to proclaim himself master of those in his employ, he felt sure that some lucky stockbroking stroke had righted the house; and that the firm of Hamlyn and Co. was solvent as that of Coutts.

"I have sent for you, Spilsby," said Richard Hamlyn, "to communicate to you a piece of agreeable news—agreeable news, which the interest created in your favour in my mind by twenty years of laborious and faithful service renders doubly gratifying to my feelings."

Spilsby, who possessed an infirm cousin in the North, from whom he had great expectations, entertaining little doubt that Spilsby, of Newcastle, was gone forever, leaving his shares in the Wallsend Company to his nearest of kin, sank into a chair. Just as agitated as his unfortunate employer had been every time he entered that private room for the last eighteen months, the clerk was becoming in his turn.

"I am aware," pursued Hamlyn, in a tone that would have done honour to the Treasurer of the Philanthropic Institution, while addressing the patrons of the charity, at an annual dinner, "I am aware, my dear Spilsby, that you have a large family; and that, in these times, a large family is not maintained for nothing. I do not mean to call your salary in this house nothing; but four hundred per annum scarcely affords the means of effecting those ensurances on your life essential to the well-being of a numerous family hereafter."

Poor Spilsby felt himself revive painfully. His cousin was *not* dead! There would be no occasion for all this fudge on the part of the head of the firm, to announce to him that he was come into a little family property.

"In short, Spilsby," resumed Richard Hamlyn, "having taken all these things into my consideration; and having, I am happy to say, some trifling claim upon the good offices of the present government, I have been so fortunate as to obtain for you a far more lucrative, as well as more honourable employment, than that of remaining all your days a banking-house clerk. On Saturday night, you will be gazetted her majesty's consul at Tangier."

Less practised than the banker in the arts of simulation, the astonished clerk instantly started to his feet.

Nominated, without solicitation, to a consulship, a consulship that would remove him so far from home, that would exile him from his native country!

"The salary is between seven and eight hundred a year," added Hamlyn. "The climate salubrious—the duty light—"

"Seven hundred a year?" murmured Spilsby; "expend his parliamentary interest to the value of between seven and eight hundred a year, or ten thousand pounds? The mystery, whatever it be, is worth thirty thousand to him, at the least farthing."

"I am infinitely indebted to you, Mr. Hamlyn, sir," he resumed aloud, rising respectfully from his seat, to resume the attitude of clerkly subordination—"indebted to you to a degree my poor heart might vainly attempt to express. Your most merited goodness, sir, is a thing which, I trust, will never be forgotten by me or mine. But—"

Richard Hamlyn gasped for breath at this ominous conjunction.

"My family prospects are of a more cheering nature than you have the means to conjecture. I have relations well to do in the world, whose good-will towards me is mainly supported by knowing me to occupy a situation of trust in one of the first establishments in the moneyed world, and who would resent my leaving England. I have no ambition to become independent. I shall be content to live and die, sir, attached to the house."

Almost spasmodically, the banker wiped from his forehead a rising dew; and Spilsby, seeing his advantage, peered out significantly from under his overhanging eyebrows, as he proceeded.

"So long as the firm exists, Mr. Hamlyn, so long as the house remains open, I hope to be found at my post. I can never be happier than as the faithful servant of the most upright and honourable of masters. Permit me, therefore, without a moment's hesitation, respectfully to decline the lucrative appointment you have thus generously procured me upon the coast of Africa."

It was now the turn of Richard Hamlyn to sink unmanned into the chair.

CHAPTER XVII.

"My 'right honourable' daughter!"
NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS.

DISTRACTED as Mrs. Hamlyn had been by apprehensions of various kinds at the moment of

her return to town, her well-regulated mind became gradually restored to composure on observing the perfect self-possession of her husband, his unmitigated attention to his parliamentary duties, and a thousand minor evidences of the cessation of all pressure in his affairs. The crisis, from whatever cause it might have arisen, was evidently passed. Under such circumstances, even the methodical regularity of her household proved an advantage, soothing her spirits as by the measured rocking of a lullaby.

Moreover, all was so bright, so prosperous, so sunshiny around her, that it seemed absurd to look out for breakers when launched on that glassy sea, and under a sky so propitious. Flattering as was her position in London life, the banker's wife had never felt the value of her acceptation in society till called upon to present her daughter. The kindness with which Lydia was welcomed into the world filled her mother with gratitude towards the frivolous circles she had hitherto regarded with indifference; and she had the satisfaction to perceive that the girl so flatteringly noticed in compliment to her parents soon became a general favourite from her own merits. Seldom had a *débutante* equally lovely appeared in the *beau-monde* so free from the affectations of the day; and the fashionable world, forewarned in her favour by Lady Rotherwood (who, having taken a fancy for her at Dean Park, and having no children of her own to occupy her attention, was doubly interested in her success in life), accorded to Mrs. Hamlyn a new species of consideration as the mother of the most popular beauty of the season.

At all this Mrs. Hamlyn could afford to rejoice; for she saw that the adulation of the world exercised no evil influence on the disposition of her right-minded child; that by the maturity of Lydia, she had gained a friend; that, in whatever circle they found themselves, *she* was the first object to her daughter; that *her* slightest opinion outweighed the whole chorus of flatterers and adorers; and that she had only to appear thoughtful or indisposed, to impose an instantaneous sadness upon the lighthearted young girl. Her perception of this determined the banker's wife to exert herself to the utmost to appear cheerful and contented, while escorting her daughter to those scenes of fashionable resort, in which it was Mr. Hamlyn's desire they should attain an honourable distinction.

For there existed a source of anxiety which rendered it difficult for the affectionate mother to array herself in smiles for the opera or ball-room. Aware that the submission of her son Henry to his father's requirements had been a matter of compulsion, she was not slow to discern, from the tone of his correspondence, that he was giving way to despondency. As much as the pride of the banker was centered in the prospects of his eldest son, was that of Mrs. Hamlyn embarked in Harry's high reputation and noble elevation of character. She reverenced almost as much as she loved this child of her affections; and while noticing with anxiety the growing incoherency of his letters, felt indescribably mortified in the conviction that, by the relaxation of his efforts and infirmity of his health, he was about to disappoint the well-known confidence of the university in his power.

Aware, from certain harsh expressions hazarded by her husband at the moment of Henry's refractoriness, that Mr. Hamlyn was out of conceit of the academic honours which he regarded as the origin of his second son's conceiving himself too accomplished a gentleman for Lombard-street, it was not to *him* she could turn for comfort in her cares; and whenever letters arrived bearing the Cambridge postmark (how different in style, in spirits, nay, even in handwriting, from those she had received from the exulting traveller during his Italian expedition!), all she could do was to retreat in silence to her room, and weep unsuspected over the blighted prospects of the most gifted of her children.

For such indulgence of her feelings, however, she had little leisure. Day after day, evening after evening, the anxious mother had engagements to keep. No fashionable party was considered complete without the presence of the beautiful Miss Hamlyn, whose healthy, happy, intelligent countenance seemed to renovate the consciousness of youth and enjoyment for all whose hearts were brightened by her smiles. The table in Cavendish Square was covered with invitations; and at the first royal ball given after Lydia's presentation at court, the wife and lovely daughter of the member for Barsthorpe were noticed by the papers as having attracted universal admiration.

Richard Hamlyn's desire that his family should maintain a distinguished place in the fashionable world was, consequently, gratified—perhaps exceeded. All he ambitioned was that his wife and daughter should reflect credit upon the firm of Hamlyn and Co., and assist in the support of that aërial fabric which through life he had been labouring to uphold. That they would do *more*, he neither calculated nor desired. Like most people whose attention is absorbed by a vital interest, he had no thought to bestow on collateral projects. All he had cared for during the last five-and-twenty years, was to preserve the credit of a ruined family, and save from the Gazette—by fair means or foul—an insolvent firm; and, engrossed by the fatal nature of his expedients, had not leisure to indulge in any luxury or complication of ambitions. It had never struck him, for instance, while labouring to gild the worldly prospects of the future Hamlyns of Dean Park, that the name might derive lustre from the brilliant marriage of his daughter.

The only brother of the banker was a dignitary of the Church, who rarely quitted his preferment in the county of Durham. His sisters were married in a moderate sphere of life—the one residing also in the North, the other in Devonshire; and, accustomed to regard the alliances of his family with unexulting eyes, he had always settled it with himself that Lydia and Harriet would become the wives of country gentlemen, or mercantile men of solid condition. To aspire beyond this would have been at variance with his plans.

When, therefore, soon after Lydia's *début*, he found her attract to his house a higher order of guests than had yet sought his acquaintance, he was more startled than pleased. It appeared inconceivable to the banker that personal distinction should accrue to *him* from so insignificant a source! Nor, absorbed as he was at that moment by personal cares of the most poignant nature, had he yet found time to accommodate his views to the new position of his family, when the startling intelligence was communicated by his wife, that the Marquis of Dartford

requested permission to pay his addresses to their daughter!

The proposals were made in the most flattering manner. A letter from the marchioness was delivered by her sister, Lady Rotherwood, to the banker's wife, fully authorizing the views of her son, to whom her consent had been applied for at the moment of her recent convalescence. All she requested, in the event of his being so fortunate as to make himself acceptable to one described by various members of her family as the most charming girl in England, was, that the marriage should be delayed till the expiration of Gerald's minority, early in the ensuing month of June.

It was one night, on returning from a ministerial party, and learning that Mr. Hamlyn was still up and writing in his study, that this intelligence was communicated by his wife.

"Ramsay informed me you were busy writing?" said Mrs. Hamlyn, almost hesitating whether to enter the room, on perceiving that the banker's table was covered with papers.

"I have only been half an hour returned from the House, and have letters to answer!" was his cold reply; for it was an understood thing that none of the family were to intrude upon his retirement, unless by special invitation. When, therefore, he saw his wife, unabashed by his abruptness, quietly take her seat by the fireside, in spite of the lateness of the hour and the full dress of which it was time to disencumber herself, he felt that something important must have transpired; and almost dreaded lest, through the indiscretion of Lord Crawley and gossiping of Lady Rotherwood, something might have reached his wife of his extraordinary solicitations in Spilsby's favour, and their still more extraordinary frustration by the opposition of the clerk.

This unpleasant surmise was strengthened by the first words uttered by Mrs Hamlyn.

"You have perhaps been already apprized by Lord Crawley," said she, "of the circumstance for which Lady Rotherwood this morning afforded *me* some preparation?"

Satisfied that the mischief was done, the banker was nerving himself to rebut, by harsh reproof, any comments or inquiries his wife might seem disposed to hazard on an affair peculiarly within his province, both as a man of business and politician; when, little aware of the alarm she had excited, Mrs. Hamlyn hastened to explain herself; and the intelligence struck with double force upon the father's mind, after the humiliating panic by which it had been preceded! For once, he was overpowered by natural emotion.

To accord his unqualified consent was a matter of course. All that was at present required of him was to sanction the more familiar visits at his house of the noble suiter; Mrs. Hamlyn having conditioned with the young lover that no positive answer should be exacted from Lydia till a month's intimate companionship enabled her to judge the nature of their mutual impressions. Scarcely another father in London, however, but, under such circumstances, would have been moved to seek an interview with his daughter, in order, before he slept, to congratulate her upon her brilliant prospects, and fold more tenderly and anxiously to his heart the girl thus trembling on the verge of womanhood with its matronly responsibilities. But Hamlyn, with his wonted circumspection, contented himself with expressing to his wife his conviction that so "capital a match" would in the sequel be circumvented by the interference of prudent friends; or by the natural fickleness of a boy of Lord Dartford's age, for whose hand all the mothers and chaperons in London were barefacedly manœuvring.

"Do not let Lydia set her heart upon it!" was his parting counsel, as his wife, after due discussion of the measures to be adopted on the morrow, prepared to retire for the night. "I have a presentiment that something will occur to blight so brilliant a prospect. The thing is too preposterous—too utterly out of our sphere—and will raise up against us too many enemies and animosities, to admit of hoping that all will end as we desire. Tell her, however, that nothing shall be neglected on my part to forward her interests on the occasion."

Alas! it was not on her "interests" that either Lydia or her thoughtful mother were intent at that moment! At such an epoch of her life, the young girl wished to find herself folded for the first time with paternal warmth to the heart of her father; and deep was Mrs. Hamlyn's mortification at having to return to the dressing-room, where her daughter was anxiously awaiting her, unaccompanied by him who, as the comptroller of the destinies of the family, ought also to have been the leading influence of its affections.

"Your father, dearest, gives his gratified consent, and will in all things second our wishes!" said Mrs. Hamlyn, in a subdued voice, unwilling to damp the joy of the agitated girl by a more explicit transmission of his message.

"But he is pleased with Lord Dartford's conduct on the occasion?" persisted Lydia. "He feels as you do, dearest mother, that nothing can have been more feeling or considerate than his conduct towards us all throughout the affair?"

"Your father expressed the highest opinion of him, and his unqualified approval. As Walter's friend, Lord Dartford has long commanded an interest in Mr. Hamlyn's mind. To-morrow, at dinner, they will meet, and everything be mutually expressed which can confirm this friendly feeling."

"To-morrow, at dinner!" thought Lydia, whose young heart was naturally excited to unusual emotions of tenderness by all that was passing. "What! not *one* day's respite from business—not *one* day's abstinence from the city—to afford his countenance and support to his daughter at such a moment!"

Moderate, however, as was the banker's avowal of surprise and triumph in presence of his wife, no sooner had he bolted himself anew within the privacy of his study, than he gave way to the wildest emotion. *His* daughter a marchioness! The grand-daughter of Walter Hamlyn the banker—a marchioness! in the enjoyment of forty thousand a year—high precedence—noble estates—gorgeous jewels—all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious rank! The name of Hamlyn, of Dean Park, about to be connected with the hereditary peerage of the realm! What would the Vernons say; and how, henceforward, would the Elvaston family preserve their frigid distance? Already, he seemed to behold the future Marquis and Marchioness of Dartford arriving in triumph at Ormeau!

"My father would have been proud indeed

had he lived to see this day!" naturally escaped him. But those words and that inauspicious name recalled him to the bitterer realities of life! An involuntary shudder betrayed the sudden chill arresting the unusual expansion of his heart, as he reflected on all he had to fear, on all that might overtake both him and his during the interval to elapse before this splendid alliance could be accomplished! The consciousness which, for years past, had tinged with bitterness the luscious cup of his enjoyments every time he attempted to raise it to his lips, exercised its usual influence; and the head of the ambitious banker, which for a moment had uplifted itself with proud and gratifying anticipations, was again humbled to the dust. For he knew that a touch, a word, a whisper, might at any moment destroy the glittering fabric of his fortunes, and overwhelm beneath its ruins himself and all who bore his name!

In the anguish of his heart, he now cursed the rashness which had induced him to make his recent overtures to government, ere certain of reaping the fruits of his self-abasement; and the surprise with which Lord Crawley had a few days before received his announcement that the person for whom he had so eagerly solicited the consulship was prevented by unforeseen circumstances from profiting by the concession, recurred disagreeably to his mind.

"This clerk of yours, my dear Hamlyn, must have a prodigious idea of the advantages to be derived from sticking to your strong box!" said he, with a smile. "*Your* patronage, I suspect, carries more weight with it than ours. However, having, through your propositions, placed my paw upon this little windfall, I shall clinch it fast for one of my nephews—a poor Honourable with a wife and half a dozen children, who is not quite so sure as this Mr. Spilsby of yours, of the crumbs that fall from the table of Hamlyn and Co.!"

Every syllable of this, though uttered at random, spoke daggers to the diseased mind of the banker. Imputing undue significance to the idle banter of a man whose success in political life was mainly owing to the pungent pleasantries and slapdash recklessness of his parliamentary eloquence, Richard Hamlyn trembled to reflect that he whose suspicions were thus unluckily awakened was uncle to the Marquis of Dartford!

On the morrow, however, he had so far recovered his presence of mind, and chalked out the path to pursue, as to bear his part, in the aptest manner, in the ceremonial of receiving Lord Dartford for the first time in the character of a son-in-law; and the young lovers, already gratified by the affectionate warmth of Mrs. Hamlyn and triumphant joy of Walter, had no fault to find with the calmer but scarcely less strongly-expressed approval of the banker.

The whole establishment in Cavendish Square seemed suddenly startled into life, as by the touch of the torch of Prometheus, by this surprising glorification. Already, Lady Rotherwood had confided it in strictest secrecy to a sufficient number of intimate friends to secure the report being bruited through all the clubs of the West End; while Captain Hamlyn was, on his part, too deeply interested that it should reach the ears of Lord and Lady Vernon to oppose a *very* firm contradiction to the rumour. That it *did* reach their ears, a very few days sufficed to demonstrate. Apprehensive that their bitter disappointment on the occasion might be suspected, and expose them to ridicule, Lucinda and her mother hastened with their congratulations to Cavendish Square; as if of opinion that they could not efface by too prompt or too servile assiduity their previous slights towards the long-contemned family at Dean Park.

No sooner, however, was it understood in the coteries of London that an engagement between the beautiful *débutante*, "the lovely and accomplished Miss Hamlyn," and the young Marquis of Dartford was avowed by all parties, than malice began to whet the weapons usually exercised on such occasions by the idle and malicious; the former to divert their leisure—the latter to gratify their spite. Not a dowager at Almack's but whispered confidentially to her sister chaperons that "the young marquis had been shamefully taken in—that he was not of age—a mere boy—a mere *child*—weak in intellect, though strong in wilfulness; whereas the Hamlyns were crafty, artful people, who from his boyhood had been trying to entrap him; profiting for the purpose by the influence of their eldest son over the poor lad—first as his Eton fag, afterward as his cornet in the Blues. The whole was a scheme—a cunning scheme—devised among these presuming *parvenus!* The artful banker, conniving with the manœuvring mother, had compelled their vain, silly son to bring down this young nobleman perpetually to Dean Park, where Miss Hamlyn was incessantly thrown in his way; till, in the sequel, they would not hear of the marquis's quitting the house before he had made formal proposals to the young lady."

Such was the mendacious version of the affair sanctioned by the smiles and nods of the Vernons wherever they went; Lord Vernon having accused himself at Brooks's of being the most unfortunate of mankind—*not* because his wife was again unsuccessful in netting a marquis, but because this disproportioned alliance of the Hamlyn family would thrust them forward so offensively in the county, that he feared he should be no longer able to overlook the vicinity of Dean Park to the Hyde!

There were those, it is true, who, moved by the genuine representations of Lady Rotherwood, viewed the affair in a more legitimate light; and saw that it was precisely *because* she had never been forced upon his notice, that the young marquis, proud of his own good taste in discovering the merits of the natural and unpretending Lydia, had resolved to assert his independence of the flimsy prejudices of fashionable fastidiousness by making her his wife. Others, warned by their parental experience, applauded the wisdom of the Dartford family in according their unhesitating consent to a respectable marriage; considering that the marquis was an only son, the last of his race, and with a sufficient tendency towards the break-neck and knocker-wrenching exploits of the day, to render his early settlement in life a matter of first-rate importance.

Meanwhile, all was happiness in Cavendish Square! Few spots and few moments more bright and auspicious than the home of opulent parents, under the excitement of the happy betrothment of a beloved daughter! On all sides, congratulations—gifts—flowers—the affectionate welcome and professions of new connexions, and the triumphant joy of old! Mrs. Hamlyn,

instead of lamenting the premature settlement in life that was to deprive her of her daughter's company, felt inexpressibly relieved by the certainty of placing her Lydia in a happy home, under the protection of an adoring husband, instead of seeing her exposed to the precarious chances of her present fortunes. Walter was almost wild with delight at a connexion purchased by no degrading sacrifices, yet at once securing happiness to his sister and support to his own projects of alliance; while Henry wrote from Cambridge an expression of melancholy delight that at least *one* member of his family was happy and prosperous.

Even poor Miss Creswell lost sight of the fate of her annuity, in the expectation of beholding her beloved pupil a marchioness; and when Lydia's letter, announcing her perfect happiness, reached Burlington Manor (accompanied by a few lines from Lord Dartford, containing arch allusions to the sledge-party, and a certain dried branch of Arabian jessamine, which existed, and was to exist so long as he lived, in his pocket-book, after having originally flourished and been presented to him, in the conservatory at Burlington), the good old colonel not only shed tears of joy at the news, but protested that the moment he had got through his engagements to his neighbours at the Vicarage, Ormeau, and Gratwycke House, he would hurry up to town to bestow his blessings upon the kind-hearted and lovely girl, who was dear to him almost as a daughter.

"You must bear me company, Ellen," said he, "and make my little Lydia's acquaintance. I have always been in hopes you would come to love each other as sisters. Though you weren't over and above civil to the young captain when he was at Dean, you had certainly so far an excuse, that whatever attention you might show to *him*, you were obliged to extend to the marquis. However, 'tis some comfort, at all events, that you agree with me in thinking young Dar'ford a trump—a fine, free-hearted young fellow—gentleman to the backbone! So the sooner we go and offer our congratulations to poor dear Mrs. Hamlyn (who won't know whether to laugh or cry at losing such a daughter, bless her poor heart! and gaining such a son-in-law) the better. I'm free to own that I love to see two young folks a-courting, when there's nothing likely to thwart their courtship; and as you won't promise me the pleasure of any billing and cooing by my *own* fireside, faith, I must go and make the best use of my spectacles at my friend Hamlyn's!"

Opportunity for observation was certainly not wanting; for every day, punctual to the moment sanctioned by Mrs. Hamlyn, the marquis's Brougham drove up to the door; and it would have been difficult to decide which looked the brighter, gayer, or sweeter—the young lover, or the boquet of rare flowers with which he came provided to propitiate the happy Lydia. Till the hour arrived for Lydia to ride with her brother Walter, or drive with her mother, Lord Dartford remained, listening to her sweet singing or sweeter conversation. Dinner-time brought him again, when no engagements interfered, to rejoin the family circle for the remainder of the day.

It is true, the family circle was rarely a private one; and now, in addition to Mr. Hamlyn's usual formal dinner-parties and political banquets, it became necessary to return the series of entertainments by which Lord Dartford's family chose to mark their approval of a match, which, unable to prevent, they were wise enough to take the merit of sanctioning. In addition to Lady Rotherwood, who really loved both her nephew and the object of his choice, and rejoiced in their prospects of happiness, a variety of noble cousins made eager interest for the eventual civilities of Dartford Hall, by the promptitude of their attentions to the future bride; and day after day did the Morning Post record, for the edification of the polite world, that the "Duke and Duchess of This, or Earl and Countess of That, with the Earl and Countess of Rotherwood, the Marquis of Dartford, and Lord Crawley, had honoured Mr. Hamlyn with their company to dinner, at his mansion in Cavendish Square."

"Did you ever see anything to equal the pretensions of those Hamlyns!" was now the cry of Lady Bondwell and her class. "See how they have gradually wormed themselves into the very highest place in the fashionable world! Step by step, how all their progress has been calculated! How cunningly must they have crawled, and crept, and smiled, and whispered, to stock their acquaintance with a sufficient quantity of lords and ladies to enable them to cut all their old friends! First, they pushed their son in the world, that the son might push his sister; and the children, having established themselves so brilliantly in life, will push on their parents in return!"

"Ay, ay, ay!" was Sir Benjamin Bondwell's reply to these insinuations of his indignant spouse; "but you won't get *me* out of Russell Square a day the sooner for that! *I* know the cost of these lordly acquaintances to a banker. One must pay through the nose for a duke, and be out of pocket many a long hundred to secure a pack of royal highnesses to the list of one's fêtes, after the fashion of that poor deluded man, Hamlyn. 'Keep your shop, and your shop will keep *you*!' says the proverb; but while keeping such cursed fine company, a banker has a hard matter to keep himself out of the Gazette! They tell *me* Hamlyn's to be made a baronet in the next batch! Why not a peer at once? A lord, on 'change, would be a novelty! If I *did* sell myself to government, it should not be too cheap!"

But Lady Bondwell, as the lady-consort of a mere Peg-Nicholson-knight, was overwhelmed at the idea of having to yield precedence to Lady Hamlyn.

"'Tis a hard matter to guess *where* their ambition will stop!" cried she. "But I've heard of people who, by putting all their silver into the tankard, had nothing left to drink in it when 'twas turned out of the mould."

By the expiration of the month, at the end of which Lord Dartford was enabled to announce to his mother the certainty of her speedily becoming a dowager—since he was an accepted man, and happier in Lydia's affections than in his numberless sources of earthly happiness—a thousand ill-natured attacks had been made in the Sunday papers, and other outlets of the envy, hatred, and malice of society, upon the *mésalliance* of the young marquis, and the presumption of a banker's family in pretending to commingle its three emblematic balls of Lombardy with those of a coronet!

Unused, in the respectable obscurity of his earlier days, to this species of notoriety, Richard

Hamlyn shrunk in agony from the blistering touch of the branding-iron, and even performed a pilgrimage to the house of the solicitors to whom he had referred Miss Creswell and her annuity, to consult them respecting the prosecution of the offenders. But Messrs. Wigwell and Slack had, fortunately, sufficient business of the firm of Hamlyn and Co. already on their hands to be able to dispense with the job; and, consequently, disinterestedly advised the banker to pocket the affront of being called a banker, in English somewhat less courtly than that he was in the habit of hearing at his dinner-table in Cavendish Square.

"The operation of clearing out a cesspool," observed the shrewd lawyer, "though essential to the well-being of the community, is often fatal to those who charge themselves with the disagreeable duty. As the prosecutor of one of these prints, you will have to suffer a thousandfold more indignities than by allowing them an occasional fling at you. I recommend you to compound for the lesser evil. A character, such as yours, my dear sir, a name which sheds lustre on the man who bears it, a renown for integrity and worth such as few noblemen but would barter their coronets to obtain, may well enable you to hear a few idle twittings concerning your connexion with Lombard-street."

At this exposition, Mr. Hamlyn, as in gratitude bound, extended his hand to his solicitor, and a squeeze of becoming fervour and duration was exchanged between them; although the banker was every way entitled to a prodigality of praise measured out to him, per Lincoln's Inn tariff, at a ratio of thirteen and fourpence per fudge.

A far more interesting subject, meanwhile, was beginning to occupy, for his behoof, the attention of his legal delegate. The solicitors of the Marchioness of Dartford had forwarded to them, immediately after the formal betrothment of the young couple, a *précis* of the liberal intentions of the young bridegroom; and it was, of course, more agreeable to examine, with Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, a schedule of the splendid and unencumbered Dartford property, than to grope in the mysteries of the newspaper press.

On all sides, the matrimonial plot was thickening. The noble invalid from Dartford Hall arrived in town, to make the acquaintance of her future daughter-in-law; while Colonel Hamilton was hourly expected at Fenton's with *his*, to become an eyewitness of the general happiness. All was mirth, and promise of mirth, in Cavendish Square.

There was some difficulty in recognising, under its present brilliant and aristocratic aspect, the sober dulness which, for so many years, had enveloped the methodical household of Hamlyn the banker!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It were better to meet some dangers half way, though they come nothing near, than to keep too long a watch upon their approaches: for if a man watch too long, it is odds he will fall asleep."—BACON.

"I HOPE and trust my young friend the marquis won't be jealous, my dear, when he hears that your mother (who stopped the carriage just now to welcome me to Lon'on, at the corner of Holles-street), told me I should find you alone, and gave me warrant for a *tête-à-tête?*"

"Gerald is very indulgent at present," replied Miss Hamlyn, with a smile. "These are courtship days, you know! I will not promise you, dearest Colonel Hamilton, that he will allow me to tell you a year hence, how truly glad I am to be again sitting by your side!"

"I must try and keep him in good-humour with me, by some more Lion-hunts!" said the colonel, laughing. "As you say, these are courtship-days; and I couldn't help feeling glad, my dear, when I heard they were to be spun out a bit, by making you wait for the wedding! For even in the happiest marriages, wedlock has as many thorns as courtship roses."

"Are you trying to cast a gloom upon my bright prospects?"

"Rather, my dear Lydia, to put you into conceit with the old marchioness's whimsicality."

"I assure you that among the many kind things Lady Dartford has done towards me," she replied, "her postponement of our wedding has been the kindest. Gerald and I are allowed to see each other daily; and I do not mind saying to *you*, who so dearly love and appreciate my best of mothers, that I should not have been happy to leave her here alone, till Harry is established at home to keep her company. My sister will be two years longer in the school-room; and my father's time, between the banking-house in the morning and House of Commons at night, is so thoroughly taken up, that I fear dear mamma would miss me, unless Harry were at hand to take my place."

"Why, to say the truth, I fancied just now that Mrs. Hamlyn looked a little paler and thinner than usual. Though she said a thousand fine things about her new son-in-law, I fancied I saw tears in her eyes!"

"Not on *our* account—for I can assure you that she is beginning to love Lord Dartford as if he were a child of her own! And so she ought, for it is impossible to be more dutifully attached than he is to mamma. But I fear she is uneasy about Harry."

"What the deuce! the senior wrangler has not been turning restiff again, has he? not been bitten anew, with the bankerphobia, I hope?"

"Poor mamma fancies he is ill and unhappy, because he has written to prepare her for being deeply mortified at the result of his approaching examination."

"Why, 'tisn't *that* frets her, I hope? Surely a woman surrounded with every earthly blessing can afford to dispense with a few cheers in the Cambridge Senate House, for one of her sons?"

"Not when their absence is a proof of his spirit being broken, as in the present instance. With Henry's brilliant abilities, it is impossible not to attribute the sudden change in his college standing to the disgusts by which his mind is overpowered. However, it is useless to talk of it! My father's will is as that of the Medes and Persians, and the less said about it the better! So talk to me about Mrs. Hamilton—talk to me about *Ellen!* Why didn't you bring her with you to-day?"

"She has caught a sad cold on the railway—the cold of an opera-singer, in my private conviction. I've a notion, my dear, that the poor girl is particularly tenacious of forms and ceremonies as regards your family, from whom she formerly received a bit of a slight. Unless I'm much mistaken, Ellen will not set foot in Cavendish Square till you've some of ye been to

say, 'How d'ye do' to her, at our Hotel in St. James's-street."

"*That* may be very easily managed!" cried Lydia, laughing. "As soon as mamma comes home, we will drive straight to Fenton's. But I hope Mrs. Hamilton is not a formal person? It is my hope that we may see very much of each other; and—"

"Thank ye, thank ye, my dear! She won't be formal with *you*, Lydia. She's prepared to love you with all her might and main. And what's more, she's very fond of your handsome young marquis, my dear, 'Gerald,' as you've the sauciness to call him. She was quite sorry when he left Dean Park! For he often walked over to the Manor, and used to amuse Ellen for hours, rhodomontading about *you;* how much better you talked and walked, rode, drove a pony-chaise, shot at a mark, played billiards, and did all sorts of tomboy things, that would shock Miss Creswell to hear of—than any other charmer of his acquaintance! Nay, don't look so angry! He didn't accuse you, perhaps, of *quite* all these accomplishments. But he said that one of your great charms consisted in not being missish; in speaking your mind frankly, and enjoying life cordially; not like a wax doll stuffed with bran, after the fashion of half the young ladies or ladyships of his acquaintance."

"And pray is his account of Mrs. Hamilton equally to be relied on?" cried Lydia, much amused. "For he pronounces her the most beautiful woman in England; in proof of which he asserts that Alberic Vernon, of woman-hating renown, has fallen desperately in love with her."

"I hope he'd the grace to tell you, at the same time, that the passion is anything but mutual? He and I used to amuse ourselves for hours watching Master Alberic making the agreeable, and she, snubbing him every moment, as if he cost nothing; while your brother Watty, who has a mighty leaning towards these Vernons, used to look as if he were sitting on hot iron, for fear the young spark should take offence at Ellen's plain speaking."

"I think Walter *has* rather a partiality for the *Hyde!*" said Lydia, gravely.

"Lord Dartford used to swear he was in love with that pretty die-away damsel of a daughter. So I don't suppose he'll be *particularly* pleased at hearing what has happened since he and the marquis left Dean Park."

"To Miss Vernon?"

"No, to her popinjay of a brother! After all he's perpetually saying against matrimony, the coxcomb actually popped the question to Nelly! To be sure, she didn't give him an opportunity to make quite as great an ass of himself as I could have wished; for she desired *me* to convey to him as decided a negative as one could well express without knocking him down. So I lost all the fun I'd promised myself in a long courtship, which I knew would end with having to bow him out at last."

"What! not tempted by that fine old place? Why, I don't think that *I*, dearly as I love Gerald, could have withstood the Holbein Gallery and golden grove of oaks at the Hyde!" cried Lydia. "Seriously, however, dear Colonel Hamilton! what consternation must it have caused in the Vernon family, to hear of their unparalleled son and heir being rejected by a person so unconnected with the peerage!"

"I know only one thing that would have created *greater* consternation, my dear—*i. e.*, her accepting him! Bless your soul, that man and woman in armour—his father and mother—would have died no other death than seeing Alberic the Great united with a commoner's widow! There would have had to be as fine a funeral at Braxham Church, as I hope there'll be a wedding at Ovington, come next June! By-the-way, my dear, it would have done your heart good to see how proud the worthy doctor was when your letter arrived, apprizing him of your marriage, and asking him to perform the ceremony, which was just like one of yours and your mother's kind and pretty thoughts! For, you see, Markham fancied that your father, being up to his ears in dignitaries of the Church, would be wanting a bishop at least, for the grandeur of the thing."

"On the contrary—but for my respect for Dr. Markham—Lord Dartford's tutor, old Mr. Buckingham, would have been the man."

"Well! some of these days, my dear, you must find a good living for Markham, in your lord's list of preferment! He wants it, I suspect, poor fellow! for there's another little olive-branch coming some time this spring! One could almost fancy there was some especial grace in parsonage-houses, to favour their sprouting! I'm to be godfather, I'd have you to know; and I shall be having Lord Dartford next asking me to be bridesman! Poor Jack is everybody's odd man—everybody's dirty dog! But good-by, good-by, my dear! I've promised to be home by three, to beau Ellen to the Panorama of Naples. She's always hankering after Italy—foolish girl!"

"And is not afraid, it seems, of increasing her cold by a visit to Leicester Fields!"

"Ah! Well! I see I've let the cat out of the bag! Never mind! *You* will know how to make allowances for her, my dear Lydia, and persuade your mother to be prompt in giving us a call."

But there was no farther need of the suggestion. In the course of the day, Colonel Hamilton (who, living in a circle composed of persons mutually interested in each other's affairs, was apt to repeat all that he heard) related to Ellen, after describing the great happiness of Lydia, the uneasiness entertained by her mother on Henry's account. Having at that moment wholly forgotten the Trinity letter and Whitehall encounter, it did not occur to him that his lovely companion was peculiarly interested in knowing that, so far from turning out first man of his year, Henry Hamlyn was likely to prove a failure, so thoroughly was his spirit damped by having been *forced* by his father into a career the most distasteful to his feelings; and Colonel Hamilton having expressed himself with all his usual warmth concerning the disappointment experienced on the occasion by his excellent mother, Ellen instantly made up her mind to volunteer a visit with him to Cavendish Square the following day.

In the interim, however, even this project was forestalled. Mrs. Hamlyn wrote to request that the Colonel and Mrs. Hamilton would accompany her to her box at the Opera, which was a double one; and Ellen, who a few hours before would certainly have declined the invitation, hastened to comply. She felt bound to abstain from all ungracious dealing towards one for whom she had been the innocent cause of so cruel a disappointment.

Harassed as Richard Hamlyn was at this

juncture by the unspoken menaces of Spilsby, and his deep regret at having afforded to a person so nearly connected with his noble son-in-law as Lord Crawley the remotest clue to his anxiety to disencumber his banking-house of one of its confidential servants, it would have afforded him some comfort, could he have surmised the degree of mortification unintentionally inflicted that night by his wife upon the obnoxious family of Vernon!

In selecting an opera-box for her, his choice had been solely dictated by his determination that it should be within view of Lady Vernon's; in order that the haughty ladies of the Hyde might learn by ocular demonstration that, however insolently they might rise in Warwickshire above the banker's family, in London, the acquaintanceships of Mrs. Hamlyn were pretty nearly their own; and from the commencement of the season, it was, consequently, wormwood to Lucinda to see the marquis—*her* marquis—seated by the side of the lovely and elegantly-dressed Lydia, whom a few months before she had treated as an insignificant school-girl; more especially as, whenever Mrs. Hamlyn felt too much out of spirits to attend the opera, Lady Rotherwood officiated as chaperon to the future marchioness, and, within view of the Vernons, treated her future niece with all the affection of a mother, and far more than the consideration she had ever testified towards any inmate of the Hyde! Lord Vernon resented it, of course, as a new injury on the part of Providence, that the lessee of her Majesty's Theatre should have presumed to let one of the boxes within four of his own, to such people as the family of Hamlyn the banker. But there was no remedy! Either Lucinda and her mother must renounce the enjoyment of the opera, or find all their delight in Grisi and Rubini imbittered by this infamous misappropriation of the Marquis of Dartford, and Box 27!

But on the night in question an aggravation of evil was in store for them. On their way to their box, Lady Vernon had claimed the arm of the Duc de Montmorency, one of the diplomatic *attachés*; a person whom, in the absence of a promising match as the attendant of her daughter, she regarded as an ornament and addition to her box; and, as the duke was too well-bred to take an immediate leave of the lady who honoured him by so pointed a preference, he sat down patiently to be flirted with and smiled upon by Lucinda.

Scarcely, however, had he been five minutes seated, when his double glasses were levelled steadily at the seat usually occupied by the Hamlyns; and, unwilling to provoke the observations certain to be made by a dozen different visiters, every opera-night, touching the great good fortune of Lord Dartford and the striking beauty of his intended bride, Miss Vernon took no notice of the preoccupation of her companion.

But persons of the Duc de Montmorency's nation seldom keep their impressions to themselves. His admiration soon burst forth in exclamations of "*charmante!*" "*divinement belle!*" "*un port de déesse!*" "*une taille de nymphe!*"

"She is very pretty, certainly; and how admirably Persiani is singing to-night," observed Lucinda, in hopes of moderating his enthusiasm.

"Admirably! But who *is* this lovely neighbour of yours?"

"The daughter of a banker, a person of whom you are likely never to have heard."

"*You* are speaking of Miss Hamlyn, the beautiful creature the Marquis of Dartford is to marry," said the duke, eagerly. "I have seen *her* hundreds of times, and been enchanted as often. In my opinion, she is nearly the prettiest, and quite the best-dressed girl in town. But the lady I am admiring is a thousand times more beautiful. *Juste ciel!* If *such* a woman were to appear at our opera in Paris, not an eye in the house but would be fixed upon her box! *Elle ferait fureur!* But nothing makes a sensation in London! In London, it is scarcely worth while to be a beauty, or a comet, or a cat with six legs. You chilly *insulaires* would scarcely be at the trouble of an interjection, were Cleopatra herself to arrive sailing in her galley on the Thames. And, by-the-way, yonder lovely being gives one rather the idea of Cleopatra!"

Lucinda Vernon, afraid, perhaps, of being classed among her uninterjectional country people, now affected some interest in the subject; and, instead of being satisfied with her own *lorgnon*, borrowed the huge Parisian ivory double barrels of the duke, to examine the new beauty.

"She is, indeed, wonderfully handsome!" was her irrepressible exclamation. "Look, mamma! the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life."

"A fine woman, certainly," responded Lady Vernon in her turn; "doubtless some vulgar city connexion of the Hamlyns!"

"City connexion, perhaps, but not vulgar," was the duke's remonstrance; and in another minute, as if unable to restrain his curiosity concerning her, he rose, and was about to leave them, when the boxkeeper's key grated in the lock, and Alberic made his appearance.

"I dare say my brother can inform us who she is!" said Miss Vernon, eager to detain him. "He knows the people she is with. Alberic! *who* is the lady with Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter to-night?"

Alberic Vernon, who had come straight from his cab to his mother's box from a holy horror of *committing* himself by promiscuous lounging in the boxes of other ladies, protested that he had not yet had time to look round the house; but, after a fussy adjustment of his glasses, as though for the discovery of a planet, and regardless (in order to satisfy the curiosity of a man so fashionable as Montmorency) of his usual terror of placing himself prominently forward in his family-box, leant over the head of his sister to examine the contents of "the menagerie of Hamlyn the banker."

To have encountered the eyes of a basilisk would not have produced a more electrical effect upon his nerves. Instantly receding into his place, instantly withdrawing his glasses, and losing all colour from his cheeks, and all assurance from his address, he began to stammer forth remarks upon the new ballet. But the duke was not to be thus distanced, and renewed his inquiries. "*Who* was the lady?"

"A widow," was Alberic's hurried reply; "a woman you have probably never met, and are never likely to meet in society."

And again he fastened upon the ballet; but Montmorency persisted in inquiring the name of the lady he was never destined to meet in society.

"Hamilton!"

"Ha! a very good name—an historical name.

The English name of all others best known on the Continent," cried Montmorency. Your Scottish Duke of Hamilton is the representative of one of our French duchies."

"But this person has nothing to do with our Scottish Duke of Hamilton," cried Lady Vernon, vexed beyond her patience. "You are probably unaware that the names of the great Scotch families extend to all the retainers of their clan; and there is no more connexion between these vassals and the head of their house than there would be between your coachman and you, were it the custom of your great French houses to give *their* patronymic to their servants.

"I am quite aware of it!" cried the duke. "But, while contemplating yonder beautiful creature, I am inclined to parody the observation of your famous comedian, and say, 'If God writes a legible hand, that woman is a lady!'"

"She shall be an empress, if you like!" pettishly rejoined Lucinda; "but I can assure you that she is a person we should very reluctantly admit into our society."

Montmorency, too well-bred a man to gainsay the dictum of so fair a lady, uttered some commonplace remark concerning the ballet, by way of changing the conversation, and, unluckily, addressed his sally to Alberic Vernon, who, with his natural susceptibility of egotism of a Frenchified prig, concluded that his secret was known, and the duke talking *at* him.

"The lady is cruel, I see!" said Montmorency, adverting to the gorgeous baron in front of the stage, who had just flung himself at the feet of Cerito. "The Herr Baron yonder is too great a barbarian to perceive that it requires something besides his empty grandeur to subdue the heart of a pretty woman. I *hate* a fellow who makes love on the strength of his sixteen quarterings! So, apparently, does our bellissima ballerina."

Before Mr. Vernon could rouse himself from the shock of what he considered a stroke of persiflage, Montmorency had left the box in search of some friend of Dartford's, who would perhaps put him in the way of a presentation to the beautiful friend of the Hamlyns; and no sooner was he gone, than Lucinda and her mother burst into exclamations of wonder at the want of tact exhibited by foreigners in detecting the characteristics of high and low in English society.

"I should really have thought that a Montmorency—a member of the family of the first baronial family in Christendom—might know better than throw away his admiration on the vulgar widow of a son of that upstart Colonel Hamilton!" said Lady Vernon, swelling with ruffled majesty, and fanning herself with such fervour of indignation, that Alberic entertained little doubt the news of his unhappy passion had already reached his family. His only hope was that—thanks to the ladylike discretion of its charming object—tidings of his rash declaration and immediate rejection might be somewhat longer on the road.

Still, though he would willingly have condemned poor Ellen Hamilton to be thrown into the caldron of boiling oil in which the Jewess of Constance was made to atone for the brightness of her eyes, he thought proper to vindicate his choice by the force of lordly example.

"You were wrong to say that Mrs. Hamilton was a woman you should be sorry to associate with, Inda!" said he, addressing his sister; "for nothing is more likely than that you will have her next winter at Ormeau, to which place you seem bent upon despatching an olive-branch."

"At Ormeau? Yes! I remember now that the Hamiltons had worked themselves into an acquaintance with the Duke of Elvaston before we left the country!" said Lady Vernon, unable to avoid, without retreating into the back of her box, the vexatious spectacle of the Duc de Montmorency presented in form to Mrs. Hamilton and Lydia Hamlyn by the Marquis of Dartford.

"And *since* you left the country, they have spent a fortnight there to so much purpose, that Lord Edward Sutton is wild to marry Colonel Hamilton's daughter-in-law, and his family equally eager to promote the match."

"Lord Edward Sutton? What *can* he mean by debasing himself in such a way? Why, he inherits the Wrottesley property, and is in possession of six or seven thousand a year! Lord Edward can afford to marry whom he pleases!"

"The reason, I suppose, that he wishes to marry Mrs. Hamilton."

"I can understand," continued his mother, not heeding his interruption, "that a young man in the situation of Captain Hamlyn, who has no pretension to connexion, and only just enough money to wish for more, might be tempted by Colonel Hamilton's fifteen or twenty thousand a year (what has he?) to make up to his daughter-in-law. A very suitable match on both sides! But for a man of family and fortune like Lord Edward Sutton—it is really disgusting! I should just as soon expect, Alberic, to hear her talked of for *you*!"

This was said wholly without design; for Lady Vernon was precisely the sort of woman whom a gossip must be endued with more courage than usually falls to the lot of that sneaking tribe, to accost with intelligence at the degradation of her son. Barlow of Alderham, the only man aware of what had been going on between the Hyde and Burlington Manor, no more dared advert to the subject in his letters to Grosvenor Place, than lay a sacrilegious finger upon the monuments in Braxham Church! But young Vernon, accustomed to hear the sparring of innuendo systematically carried on between his father and mother (who were apt, like the populace of Rome during the Carnival, to knock each other down with flints formed into the semblance of sugarplums!), had little doubt that he was being flogged over the shoulders of Lord Edward Sutton.

While this uneasy family were studying how to convert even the pleasures of life into pains, and ingrafting hyssop on the rose, the inmates of Mrs. Hamlyn's box were enjoying one of those pleasant evenings which arise for people of well-regulated minds from the elements of amusement around them—agreeable friends, fine music, exquisite dancing, and a succession of fair faces lining the *salle de spectacle* for the recreation of their eyes during the intervals of the performance. The musical taste of Mrs. Hamilton, which was not only of the highest order, but refined by three years' residence and instruction in Italy, enabled her to appreciate the high merits of a company which, after the London fashion, the casual visiters to the box made it a point to decry and disparage, though certain to revert to it five years afterward, when no longer attainable, as the finest in the

world. Those well-known airs of the Lucia were to *her* ears familiar and precious as some rich shrine to the eyes of a votary; nor did the plaintive character of the music lose by the companionship of those with whom she found herself in association.

While, in the eyes of Lydia, whose heart was softened by the perfect and unalloyed happiness of her situation between the mother of her veneration and the lover of her choice, this beautiful stranger derived the highest interest from her relationship to their excellent friend the colonel, Ellen could not forbear regarding Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter in the light of a sister and mother lost to her forever! All she had heard from Henry of the womanly excellences of the former—all she saw in the face of the latter to remind her of the intelligent beauty, the frank cordiality of the object of her affection—imparted new interest in her heart to the kindness with which she was welcomed by both. She felt herself, in short, to be one of the family; and even Colonel Hamilton, though tolerably accustomed now to the effect of her rare beauty, was struck by the exquisite expression imparted by the awakened sensibilities of her heart to one of the finest faces in the world.

While he sat conversing between the acts with Mrs. Hamlyn, the marquis was engaged in eliciting from Ellen instructions for his meditated bridal tour.

"Admit that I am every way the luckiest of the human race, my dearest Mrs. Hamilton!" said he. "In these times, when everybody has seen everything, and half the angelic beings in London are as *blasé* in the pleasures of life as old gentlemen of fifty, to have found a little wife who knows no more of the world than I do myself—who is just as vulgarly delighted as I am with a good opera—and just as enthusiastic in her desire to see something more of valley and mountain in the way of landscape, than old England!—sensible people, like your friends the Cossingtons—or fashionable people, like *my* friends the Vernons—would, I dare say, despise us as a couple of silly children, whose rawness and newness are something unaccountable. But I assure you that, if there be one thing more than another for which I am obliged to my friend, Mr. Hamlyn, it is for having secured me pretty nearly the only wife with whom I could commence, hand in hand, my experience of the pleasures of life. So you see that, if we are children together, we shall be very happy ones! Indeed, I am beginning to think that we two and Colonel Hamilton are the *only* children left in the world!"

Miss Hamlyn interrupted him to entreat Mrs. Hamilton's indulgence towards his egotism.

"I beg to say that I do *not* apologize!" persisted the young lover, fixing his eyes admiringly on the lovely face that borrowed new charms from the blushes by which it was now overspread. "I look upon Mrs. Hamilton, my dear Lydia, as one of the family; and shall be only too happy to listen when she favours *me*, in return for my selfish confessions, with sisterly confidences of a similar nature."

Though this was said at random, and with reference to Colonel Hamilton's avowed projects in favour of Walter rather than to Henry, with whom at present Lord Dartford had little acquaintance, it sufficed to alarm the womanly dignity of Ellen Hamilton; and her countenance forthwith assumed that quiet gravity which so well became its chaste but somewhat severe expression.

It was at this pause in the conversation that the door of the box was opened to admit Captain Hamlyn and the Duc de Montmorency, who had applied to Walter to present him to his family; and Dartford, who, with all his dispositions to be brotherly, had not quite forgotten his friend's avowals of contempt for the rusticity and want of refinement of Colonel Hamilton's daughter-in-law, could scarcely repress a smile at the deferential manner in which he was already beginning to address the lady whom he found to be an object of adoration to dukes and the sons of dukes.

It is true that the marquis, prevented by his advantages of birth from appreciating the influence of mere rank upon certain dispositions, attributed the altered manner of Walter Hamlyn to the growing ascendency of Ellen Hamilton's beauty over his feelings; and took an opportunity to whisper to Lydia, when the others were engaged in conversation, that he suspected his friend Sutton would have to run a neck-and-neck race with his friend Walter for the hand of the "beautiful Ellen."

Too slavishly fashionable, meanwhile, was the captain, to be seen at his mother's opera-box longer than the time necessary for the presentation of his diplomatic friend! Intending to return, towards the close of the ballet, and offer his arm to Mrs. Hamilton through the crush-room to the carriage, while his mother was escorted by the colonel and his sister by her affianced lover, he proceeded on a short visit to the Vernons; justly calculating that the fair Lucinda would scarcely exhibit her usual hauteur towards him, with Dartford and Montmorency engaged before her eyes in the most courteous homage to his family. Nor was he deceived in his hopes of a gracious reception. Miss Vernon and her mother were not popular. Lucinda, being one of those heartless London girls who, while engaged in pursuit of a particular object, are indiscreet enough to disregard all others, and care little whose feelings they wound, found herself, when thrown out in her marquis-chase, alone in her glory—without a single suiter—without a single admirer. She had avowedly pitched her ambitions so high, that men of moderate pretensions were afraid to give way to any dawning feelings of preference.

It was, consequently, a relief when the fashionable Captain Hamlyn presented himself to occupy the place vacated by the recreant duke; affording the certainty of an attendant to call up the carriage. To detain their visiter, with this selfish view, Lucinda accordingly exerted herself to "look and talk delightfully with all her might;" and her smiles and bonmots were as brilliant and fascinating as if they had been ordered, new, bright, and shining, from some jeweller in Pall Mall.

The consequence was, that Walter remained enchanted in his chair during nearly the last act of the ballet; nor was it till a prodigious rustling of satin cloaks and fluttering of swans-down, in an opposite box, apprized him, by the departure of a royal party, that the evening's entertainments were drawing to a close, that he suddenly replaced in their morocco case the huge glasses with which opera-goers are now condemned by the force of fashion to encumber themselves, though they would be voted heavy baggage by a retreating army. Lady Vernon

and her daughter had the mortification to perceive, by the farewell nature of his bow in quitting the box, that they had nothing to hope from his assistance in steering through the crush-room!

But, alas! scarcely had Walter reached the box which bore the name of Mrs. Hamlyn inscribed on the blue label over the door, when he saw, winding along the lobby before him, its departing inmates—Mrs. Hamilton leaning on the arm of Lord Edward Sutton! All he could see of her was the rich Indian shawl which enveloped her fine shoulders, and the diamond comb presented to her that morning by her father-in-law, sparkling among the raven braids that encircled her classically-formed head.

While the family of the banker occupied this prominent and brilliant position in the eyes of the fashionable world, the fountain-head of their pomps and vanities was sorely troubled. Richard Hamlyn had dined that day at the Bankers' Club, enjoying to a degree appreciable only by hollow, worldly natures, the congratulations of his brother bankers on the approaching marriage in his family.

Some few, who had lived in the professional interchange of services with him, shook him heartily by the hand—sincerely rejoicing in an event likely to increase his domestic happiness by that of his daughter. Others—the *eques auratí*, or new-fangled baronets of the order of the Golden Calf, who looked upon financial opulence only as a bridge of ingots, whereby to crawl into the ranks of the aristocracy—expressed, by more deferential salutations, their delight at an alliance ennobling the whole bankerhood of Great Britain. One or two, of genuinely philosophical views, were moderate in their congratulations on a marriage which they regarded, like all other disproportions, as a source of social disorder; while Sir Benjamin Bondwell, and certain of his confraternity, who contemplated with a jealous eye the advancement of the Hamlyns, their pretensions to the notice of royalty and fashionable notoriety, seized upon the occasion for launching against him, under the guise of compliments, a thousand covert sneers on his

showing dolphin-like above
The element he lived in.

All that a very vulgar-minded man could string together in allusion to coronet-coaches stopped in Newgate Market on their way to call in Lombard-street, or to the Goldsmiths' Company walking in peers' robes at the coronation, was levelled at poor Hamlyn; who, like some novice exposed for the first time to the unmerciful roasting of a dinner at the Steaks, had only to smile, take all in good part, and exercise his utmost ingenuity to restore the conversation to its usual channel. It was a relief indeed to his soreness when he found himself overlooked, and his companions engrossed by the consideration of politics, in a light how different from that in which *he* was forced to view them as a Warwickshire squire! Like a certain rich Jew, who, in appreciating a matchless goblet from the hand of Cellini, estimated the metal, per ounce, at melting price—parliamentary eloquence was rated at so much a scruple; wars, and rumours of wars, were talked of according to their influence on the money-market; a massacre was described at its price current; and an inundation deplored according to its fall in consols!

At length, when such of his brethren as were neither involved in Parliament nor connected with the more attractive clubs of the Carlton quarter, sat down to finish the evening at whist, battling for half-crown points with as much waste of cogitation and earnestness as had enabled them in the course of the morning to nett thousands by a successful stroke of speculation, Richard Hamlyn hurried away to the House. There had been a time when almost the only social pleasure he really enjoyed consisted in those club-meetings. It was *his* House of Peers—*his* Heralds' College. *There* was the name of his forefathers had in remembrance. *There* still lingered two or three grave, grayheaded men, who had begun life as the bosom-friends of Walter Hamlyn, and still kept among their sacred family relics the mourning-rings they had worn on his decease.

But now, the society of these men was becoming hateful to Him of Dean Park; not because he felt elevated by his new connexions above their level, but because, by his recent policy, he had sunk immeasurably below it. He trembled at the idea that rumours might transpire, not, indeed, of the fearful nature likely to be set afloat by the intermeddling of Spilsby, but of the course he had pledged himself to pursue in Parliament on a question of financial policy deeply involving the interests of his moneyed colleagues, his systematic protection of which had for years assigned him immense importance in their eyes.

The discovery *must* come! He knew that, in the course of a few weeks, he should be pointed out among them as having sold them to government for thirty pieces of silver; though the express mintage of those pieces, and alloy of that silver, they were as yet unprepared to point out. But he dreaded the first indications of the coming storm. He shrunk from the exposure of the political baseness into which he had been betrayed by the latent terrors arising from still deeper turpitude. While undergoing the coarse bantering of old Bondwell, he dreaded every moment lest the uncompromising Sir Benjamin should assail him by the name of Judas; for a remote allusion to his filthy bargain with government would have wounded him deeper than the direct accusation of tuft-hunting.

Getting hastily into the carriage, he proceeded to the House of Commons; conscious, however, that even that dignified retreat would shortly become less consolatory to his feelings, and that the conciliations of the Treasury Bench would offer poor compensation for the general respect hitherto commanded by his altitude of parliamentary independence.

Still, the tale of his apostacy was unbruited; and he accordingly brushed past the humpbacked Quasimodo of the house, and ascended the shabbiest and dirtiest staircase in the metropolis, with his usual consciousness of the dignity attached to every component item of the first body-corporate in enlightened Europe. And, by-the-way, Richard Hamlyn having now been twenty years in Parliament, had not only progressed into the dignity of an old member, but, by the changes of the times, come to find himself remarkable for the spruceness, the utmost dandyism of his dress, compared with the less Londonized throng of his compeers of the Reformed House of Commons.

After spending an hour in the House, in a whispered colloquy over the shoulder of Lord Crawley (which, if the truth must be told, bore little reference to the very longwinded and laboured speech with which an honourable oppo-

sition member was favouring his constituents north of the Tweed, through the wearied ears of the Reporter's gallery—one of those dreary parliamentary passages that lead to nothing), the banker finding there was to be no division, returned to Cavendish Square; attributing something of the charm just then to the name of home, which every man of business connects with the leisure he has only enjoyed for five hasty minutes since the hour of an early breakfast.

His family was not yet returned from the opera; and Ramsay, as he hurried before his master into the study to light the lamp, took occasion to mention that "a person had called twice in the course of the evening, requesting to see Mr. Hamlyn."

"Did not the gentleman leave his name?" inquired the banker, who was seldom molested at his private residence by the intrusion of "persons," unless now and then a Barsthorpe constituent, who could not be made to understand that, in London, business hours conclude with the first stroke of the dinner-bell.

"The first time he came, sir, he left no name, but merely said he would call again, as we rather expected you home early," replied Ramsay, proceeding as leisurely with his task of removing and replacing the globe of the Carcel lamp as if the enlightenment of the universe depended upon the evenness of its wick and steadiness of its light! "The *second* time, sir, as he seemed so *very* persewering and determined, in making his inquiries of John as to where you had dined, and whether you were likely to be met with at the House to-night, I came to the door myself; and unless I am mistaken, sir, it was one of the banking clerks from Lombard-street."

"A baldheaded man?" inquired Hamlyn, in a low voice, and with assumed unconcern.

"He had his hat on, sir—I really can't take upon me to say. But now I think of it, John told me he had written his name."

"Where is John? Send him hither."

"The footmen are gone with the carriage to fetch my mistress from the opera," replied Ramsay; and as he replaced the carcel on the study-table, its light fell direct upon an open blotting-book, beside the bronze standish, where lay a strip of paper, evidently deposited by John, before he proceeded to his duties of the evening.

It scarcely needed for Mr. Hamlyn to cast his eyes upon the name subscribed in good clerkly text, with due regard to the open looping of the Ys and curling of the Ss, to learn that his untimely and unfortunate visiter was no other than—SPILSBY!

But what could be the meaning of this unauthorized intrusion into his private residence? A short time before, and Richard Hamlyn would sooner have expected Birnam Wood to come to Dunsinane, or the Monument on Fish-street Hill to pay a morning visit to the Duke of York's Column, as for any member of his Lombard-street establishment to make his appearance, on business of his own devising, at his private residence; the consecrated groves of Dodona being less sacred in the sight of the priesthood of Apollo, than in theirs, the scaly-barked plane-trees of Cavendish Square.

But, alas! Richard Hamlyn was not unprepared for so singular an infraction of subordination on the part of his head-clerk. The countenance of Spilsby was a book in which he was beginning to read strange things, as distinctly as though its characters were as legibly inscribed as the raised letter-press invented for the use of the blind; and from the day his daughter's marriage was publicly announced, the banker had deciphered in the eyes of his rebellious vizier a determination to turn to account the peculiar situation of his sultan. The higher, in short, the position attained by Hamlyn, the greater the power of the man who was able to precipitate him from his high estate into an abyss of infamy.

From the apex of his present prosperity, having a daughter about to form an alliance with one of the first nobles in the realm—a son distinguished by the general favour of society, and occupying a commission in one of the first regiments—another on the eve of attaining the highest academic honours preparatory to assuming his place in that house of business, to maintain the credit of which his father had attempted such terrible sacrifices—from the eminence of all this, to be precipitated into the dust, would be, indeed, a bitter reverse! The consequence was, that for every step of worldly progress effected by the banker, he fancied he could discern in the menacing looks of his enemy an additional unit augmenting the appraisement of his silence.

For a week past, the clerk had exhibited symptoms of desiring a private interview with his master; and it was with agony of spirit scarcely describable, that Hamlyn had watched him making his exits and entrances; expecting nothing less, every time he made his appearance in the private room, than an explanation, than which death itself would have been more welcome, if death could have ensued without withdrawing the curtain from the disgraceful position of his affairs.

So certain, however, did he now feel of a forthcoming crisis, that, instead of indulging in his usual prayer for a respite—for time—for the delay of a few years—in the hope that the fruition of some of his numerous schemes or a considerable bequest from Colonel Hamilton might enable him to fill up certain deficiencies in his accounts, the consciousness of which "appalled his spirit like a night-shriek," he satisfied himself with murmuring, between his grinding teeth, in the watches of the night—"but a few *months!* Only let it be delayed a few months—till Lydia's marriage shall have been solemnized, and a shelter be thus provided for the others—and I will submit myself to the worst! That worst would scarce be harder to bear than this accursed persecution!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Men are but children of a larger growth."

"BLESS my soul and body! who would ever have thought of finding *you* here, with the Vere-street clock striking the half hour to twelve as I came past!" cried Colonel Hamilton, addressing Richard Hamlyn, on entering the dining-room in Cavendish Square the following morning, as the family were rising from breakfast. "For don't fancy I came to see *you!* I fancied you safe in the parish of St. Sepulchre, or I wouldn't have set foot in your house!"

"It is not often I am idling at the West End at this hour of the day," replied Hamlyn, with a smile, affecting to humour the cheerful old man's bantering. "But I have an appointment with my lawyers at twelve, and wish to take it in my way to the city."

"Don't let *me* be any hinderance to you, then. Get into your cab with you, and be off!" cried the colonel, taking the offered seat beside Mrs. Hamlyn, "or we shall be having Messrs. Pounce and Parchment in a pucker, and all along, unless I'm mistaken, of the marriage settlements of a certain Miss Lydia Hamlyn, who sits there, looking as demure and unconcerned as if she had never heard the words jointure or pin-money! As soon as you're gone, I shall expound my business to your good lady; and a flagrant case of gossiping it is, as was ever whispered over a caudle-cup. By-the-way, however, my dear Hamlyn, as you've ten minutes on hand over your mark to reach Norfolk-street (for I conclude the clause-spinners who made such a desperate long job of our Burlington lease are still your men?), I may as well tell you some news that reached me this morning from our part of the world. There's a report of a bankruptcy afloat, which has made poor Ovington's hair stand on end."

At the word bankruptcy, Richard Hamlyn, who was gathering together his hat and gloves, winced unconsciously, and made a step back towards the breakfast-table.

"Jacob Durdan, they say, poor fellow, will be in the Gazette in no time. 'Malster,' I suppose, they'll call him? But that's not *our* affair! The thing is, that his farm is actually in the market; and lying, as it does, betwixt Burlington and Dean Park, like the keystone of an arch, I suppose you won't like it to slip through your fingers? Buy it you must—either for yourself or as young Burlington's trustee."

"I am afraid *not*!" replied Hamlyn, much surprised at the intelligence. "Durdan used to value his property at between eleven and twelve thousand pounds; and the *bonâ fide* value cannot be much less than seven."

"Then if the *bonâ fide* value's seven, to *you* 'tis worth nearer fourteen!" persisted the colonel, "and I shall think you a deused lucky dog if you get it at ten."

"Perhaps so; but I fear I must be satisfied to do without it. A man in business finds it a hard matter to lay his hands on ten thousand pounds for his private purposes."

"Not when he's got an old friend at his elbow with thirty times ten lying idle, and the grace to be thankful when an opportunity presents itself of making a portion of it useful to better men than himself."

Hamlyn felt every nerve in his frame vibrate at this critical declaration.

"Be assured, my dear sir, that you are as welcome to invest my India bonds, or any other tangible thing of mine, in land, and in your own name, as though John Hamilton were under the turf and Watty Hamlyn standing in his shoes!" persisted the colonel, fancying himself misunderstood.

The hand of the banker became spasmodically clasped in that of his generous friend, as Hamlyn replied,

"I feel all this as it ought to be felt; but Durdan's farm, at the price likely to be put upon it under such circumstances, would be a preposterous purchase!"

"Well! I suppose you know best!" cried the colonel. "I haven't enough of the country gentleman in me yet to know how many years purchase one ought to give for land. Only I concluded this must be a windfall, as Robson writes me word (with a basket of Wilmot's Superb, that he sent up by the rail this morning, which I can promise you would put all Covent Garden to the blush, and Gunter's shop to the back of it!) that Barlow of Alderham is nibbling already—for Lord Vernon, of course. Barlow is no great capitalist, I take it? But 'twould really be a nice little tit-bit to tack to the skirts of the Braxham property!"

"Certainly—beyond all doubt! And Robson tells you that Barlow has made an offer?"

"So it is supposed. But I remember Robson saying one day, as we were pottering together in the copse adjoining Durdan's, that if ever the property was in the market, you'd be sure to snap it up; and now, he writes word, the people at Ovington look upon it as already gone—so sure are they that you'll overbid Lord Vernon."

"They will prove mistaken," said Hamlyn, gravely. I should not consider it justifiable to make the purchase."

"Then I think you'll live to repent it when 'tis too late, and you find Lord Vernon growing up like a grain of mustard-seed under your nose, with all the Barlows of Alderham roosting in his branches! Barlow is looking out for a farm to enable that cub of a son of his to prove what deused bad farmers, what he calls 'a country family,' can produce!"

"However sorely tempted, I feel it my duty to forbear," still persisted the banker.

"What! when the thing takes the form of a profitable investment? Why you know very well how difficult it is, nowadays, to get even four per cent. for money; and if Robson's estimate be correct, Durdan's farm, even at the price named, will bring five! In a month or so, I shall be having one hundred and fifteen thousand pounds thrown upon my hands (if Moonjee and Company are true to their engagements), and then you'll be telling me that, instead of the six per cent. my friends at Chinderapore have hitherto secured me, I might whistle for five! However, don't let me detain you with my Ovington news! Go, and settle Lydia's business for her! Go and lay down the faggots on *your* line of road, and leave Mrs. Hamlyn and me to chat about what concerns us more than dot-and-carry-one!"

A glance which followed the direction of Colonel Hamilton's eyes at that moment exhibited to Richard Hamlyn the face of his wife, as pale as ashes—though inclined over the plate in which she was unconsciously smashing an egg-shell with a gold egg-spoon into the aspect of a choice bit of crackled china; and in his alarm lest her agitation should betray itself injuriously to Colonel Hamilton, after his departure, which was now inevitable, he felt almost inclined to reduce *her* to the same helpless consistency. For Hamlyn was gradually approaching the pitch of menial irritation which is produced by a concatenation of adverse advents—by constant brooding over evil—by terror—by sleeplessness—by remorse, which, like the desperation of the scorpion surrounded by flaming spirits, instigates frantic ferocity. In humbler life, excited by the coarser struggles of so harassing a situation, he would probably have become guilty of a crime!

But he was a banker—a man of whom calmness, serenity, plausibility, constitute a portion of the stock-in-trade. He was a banker—a man who, so far from being "passion's slave," must be as steadfast in phlegmatic self-possession as demure in demeanour. He accordingly took

from his servant his well-brushed hat and steady-looking beaver gloves; and, after a benignant nod to his family, and smile to Colonel Hamilton (the blandness of which Howard the philanthropist might have envied!), withdrew to his cabriolet—overmastering the strife of mingled fear, shame, hatred, misery, and desperation contending in his tortured breast.

For, alas! there are more Laocoons to be met with unsuspected, among the haunts of daily life, than all the united galleries of Great Britain afford to our inquiring view!

Colonel Hamilton followed him to the door with his eyes, as one loves to dwell upon the aspect of a friend in the fulness of his prosperity and joy; satisfied that if there existed a man on the face of the earth whose virtues had their reward in the attainment of perfect worldly happiness, it was that upright and self-denying individual, Hamlyn the banker!

Even Ramsay, as he waited upon his master to the snow-white steps of his stately doorway, contemplated him with the abject deference paid by the vulgar only to great capitalists, or great lords; and would have denounced as a slanderous libeller the wretch who presumed to espy a spot in such sun of glory, as the church-going, rate-paying, orphan-school-presiding, propagation-of-the-Gospel-subscribing, mild, virtuous, punctual, liberal, Richard Hamlyn, the banker!

Yet this man of universal credit was but a more polished, more cautious, more solid swindler, in the amount of thousands, where swindlers in the amount of tens or hundreds are sentenced to the hulks.

Such was the man who was proceeding into the city, overcome with dread at the idea of an impending interview with his own clerk; and while the sober, lumbering cab of the man of business was starting from the door, Colonel Hamilton proceeded to unfold the purpose of his visit, by placing in the hand of Mrs. Hamlyn a check for one hundred pounds, on her husband's bank.

"You'd do me a mons'ous favour," said he, "by looking me out this trifle's-worth of fallals for a lying-in lady and her bantling, as a present for my good friend, Mrs. Markham, to whose babe I've proposed myself as godfather. I should look like an old ass were I to present myself at one of the Bond-street frilleries, where such matters are ticketed up; and even Ellen (the more's the pity) knows nothing about caudle-cup finery; so I thought it might vex her, poor dear, if I put *her* upon executing my commission. But as I know you are going about just now, my dear ma'am, among linen and lace shops, in order to give my lady, our young marchioness yonder, a few rags to her back at parting, I thought, maybe, you'd give yourself so much trouble on my account."

"And with the more pleasure," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, "that I have an unfeigned respect and regard for the object of your kindness. No one can better than myself appreciate all that has been effected at Ovington by the influence of her example and vigilance. The late vicar was a widower; and though, during his incumbency, everything was done by Dean Park for the village that we are still doing, or in fact considerably more, the poor people were not half so healthy or happy as now—a sufficient proof that it is the care of the Markhams, and not the money we provide, which ministers to their welfare."

"Nothing can exceed the activity and thoughtfulness of that good woman," added Lydia. "Go where one will, at Ovington, or exercise what charity one may, the vicar's wife has always been beforehand with us—not only with food and alms, but useful advice, far more difficult to bestow. Mrs. Markham is a very model for parsons' wives!"

"Well, my dear, as I said t'other day, you must get Dartford to reward the virtues of the vicarage with a fat living."

"On the contrary," said Miss Hamlyn, humouring his raillery. "It strikes me that her excellences are more appropriate to a lean one. It would be very unpatriotic in me to remove the second providence of my native Ovington!"

"But being thus disposed towards Mrs. Markham," resumed the banker's wife, "believe me, you would please and prosper her much more by converting your gift into a more solid form. The Markhams are not well off. They have secured, I understand, a small provision for their children. But their family is increasing; and a hundred pounds laid by on compound interest would give your godchild a couple of hundreds to help him on, if a boy, in the outset of life."

"By George! I do believe you've caught the money-itch of Hamlyn!" cried the colonel, almost vexed. "Can't I do something for a godchild, against it wants putting out in life, without denying myself the pleasure of seeing it tidy and smart, in its long clothes and cockade?"

"Just as you please!" replied Mrs. Hamlyn, who loved the colonel too sincerely to be affronted by his occasional pettishness; "but take a woman's word for it that Mrs. Markham has too much sense to care for lace and lawn; and that, if you wish to make this money a source of satisfaction to her, you had better let me purchase some more useful present—plate, linen, furniture, rather than finery, which has little charm for those who have no admiring eyes to be delighted by the exhibition. Even the cap and robe that Lydia embroidered for little Kitty have not, I am sure, been taken out of the wardrobe a dozen times!"

"I'm afraid you're right," cried the colonel; "I wish you'd be sometimes in the wrong, if 'twas only for a change. Well, well! go to Rundell's, and look out a sober parsonage-house-like teapot and coffee-pot, and a cantine of spoons and forks. Will that suit you?"

"It will suit the Markhams, which signifies much more!" said Mrs. Hamlyn, good-humouredly; and while she was yet speaking, there dashed up to the door the well-appointed cab of her son Walter—the equipage of the man of pleasure, forming a singular contrast to that of the man of business, which had just rumbled off in a contrary direction.

"By George! here's Watty himself, in the nick of time!" cried Colonel Hamilton, rising and going to the window. "He shall drive me to the silversmith's at once, and take the trouble off your hands. Lydia, my dear, what will you give me to tell you who the captain's brought with him from the barracks?"

This intimation of Lord Dartford's arrival sufficed to send Miss Hamlyn to the drawing-room to meet their visiter; and as the colonel and Mrs. Hamlyn prepared to follow her lighter footsteps, the veteran could not forbear exclaiming that, next to the pleasure of being eighteen and in love one's self, was that of witnessing so charming a juncture in so charming a person!

"Her happiness is almost *too* great!" replied her mother, with a sigh. "I sometimes tremble to think what would be the consequence, should any unforeseen event frustrate this hopeful marriage! Her whole heart and soul are embarked in her present prospects."

"But what the deuse *should* happen to prevent it?" cried the colonel. "I hear the old marchioness is as pleased as Punch at the idea of her son's settling! As to him, if Lydia's a wee bit in love, Lord Dartford's a better specimen of a Romeo than I fancied was left upon this lukewarm globe."

"It is true," replied Mrs. Hamlyn. "But one cannot account for one's presentiments; and mine hang all the heavier on my heart that I love this warm-hearted, noble-minded boy as if he were a child of my own. I never could have expected to obtain from a son-in-law the dutiful affection with which Lydia has already inspired Lord Dartford towards her mother. I feel that to number him among my children in my prayers to Heaven, would be an addition to the happiness of my life."

"*Will* be—say *will* be—my dear ma'am! There's no *would* in the case," cried Colonel Hamilton. "I hate what nervous folks pretend to call 'presentiments.' What are they but a mistrusting of Providence! Lydia *will* be happy with her husband, and *you* with your son-in-law; and then you'll feel ashamed of having allowed yourself to glance at your bright sunshiny prospects in life, through the medium of a black crape veil! So come along into the drawing-room, and let me hear whether Walter will have anything to say to me. If we should happen to meet some of his smart brother officers, you know, he can say, I'm a quizzical old uncle from the north, from whom he has expectations."

And chuckling at his own joke against himself, the colonel hobbled into the drawing-room, and, much in the same terms, made his proposition to Walter Hamlyn.

"There's no fine folks astir yet, Watty, my boy!" said he. "What if you were to take me as far as Ludgate Hill, to choose some plate? If I haven't the benefit of better taste than my own, they'll be putting me off with some old-fashioned rubbish, and making me pay for the last new kick."

But for his vivid recollection of the "beautiful Ellen," as he had seen her leaning on the arm of Lord Edward Sutton the night before, Walter would, perhaps, have deprecated Lord Dartford's exhortations to take no farther thought of *him*, as he was quite content to remain in Cavendish Square during their expedition into the city. But as his future brother-in-law had previously announced a visit from the marchioness, at two o'clock, which must keep the rest of the party at home to receive her, there was no excuse for non-compliance with the request of Colonel Hamilton.

"And I tell you what you shall do for *me*, my dear fellow, if you are really going to Rundell's," said Lord Dartford. "Tell them that the paste model they sent me yesterday for the diadem they are resetting, is much too broad for the prettiest little head in England; and that they had better let one of their fellows take an exact measure, with gold wire or something of that kind, before they set to work. I must say," continued he, turning to Miss Hamlyn, "I think Rundell rather gone by, for anything beyond a mere necklace, though they have, unquestionably, the finest choice of diamonds. But I saw that my mother would be affronted if I took the family jewels anywhere but to the house which has been in charge of them for more than half a century."

"Quite right!" said Lydia. "After all, what does it signify? Diamonds are only valuable as the insignia of a certain rank and fortune; and whether arranged in a manner more or less becoming to the wearer, is of little consequence compared with the chance of vexing Lady Dartford. After wearing them so long, she naturally looks on them as her own; and I should have been far, far better pleased had you left them at her disposal during her lifetime."

"By which I should have deprived her of a great pleasure in seeing you wear them! Whereas, even without having a pretty daughter-in-law as a motive for leaving them off, my mother has never worn the family jewels since the death of her husband. One word more, Walter. Tell the foreman he must apply to the Heralds' Office for the Hamlyn arms he wants to quarter in the new desk-seal they are making for Dartford Hall; or, if you've one by you, perhaps you'll give him an impression?"

These commissions, so soothing to the vanity of the worldly-minded Walter, reconciled him to the idea of a drive with an old gentleman in a low-crowned hat, who had not the excuse for his originality of costume of being a county member; and having determined to make his way along those dreary Boulevards called the City Road, as a security against an encounter with his fashionable friends, he proceeded, at a slapping pace, through Pentonville and Clerkenwell, towards Gray's Inn Lane; how gloomy a contrast to the brilliant, gorgeous, animated, exciting line of road that divides the capital of France from its gay suburbs!

"That's as fine a young fellow as ever I saw in my life!" cried Colonel Hamilton, after a prolonged meditation upon the excellent temper and warm affections of the young marquis.

"A perfect gentleman, in every respect," added Walter—giving to the word "gentleman" its most extended and best interpretation.

"Your good mother, with a mother's natural partiality, always adds, 'as perfect as is compatible with a defective education.' She, you know, has been a little Greek-and-Latin bitten, ever since your brother began to carry off the Cambridge prizes! I always observe, by-the-way, that women are twice as proud of the soldiership or scholarship of their sons as the fathers. If *you'd* been one of the heroes of Waterloo, for instance, instead of one of the cheesemongers, poor Madam Hamlyn would have been desperately in love with 'guns, drums, trumpets, blunderbuss, and thunder' for the remainder of her days!"

"Lucky, then, that I have fallen on times more pacific!" said Captain Hamlyn, somewhat nettled, as is usual with the household brigade, at any allusion to his qualities as a carpet knight. "But apropos to Harry, my dear colonel, you, who are in my mother's confidence, which is the next thing to being in my brother's, for they are one and indivisible, whereas with *me* he is beginning to establish something of an Esau and Jacob jealousy—"

"Are you sure, Watty, that the grudge is not a creation of your own?" interrupted the colonel, turning suddenly towards him.

"*Quite* sure, as regards my will and feelings!

I love Harry with all my heart and soul. But, somehow or other, I have always noticed that, between only brothers, an intuitive rivalship is apt to spring up."

"Cain-and-Abelship, *I* call it—"

"Which so far exists on Harry's part towards myself, that, ever since his return from Italy, he has not been the same brother to me!"

"Why, I thought you'd scarcely met?"

"We meet by letter, every now and then," replied Walter; "but not as we used; and of all the painful things in the world, commend me to a half-confidential letter from one with whom you have been accustomed to communicate openhearted and without reserve!"

"But are *you* as frank as ever with *him?* Nothing but confidence ever begets confidence; and if Harry has found out that there's a blue chamber in your own mind, of course he's right to lock the door of *his!* To tell you my honest belief, Watty, my boy, I'm half afraid there's nothing more difficult than for brothers to maintain total unreserve. Between two friends there are no jarring interests, no mutual delicacies of a pecuniary kind to produce closeness or hesitation. But what were you beginning to say, just now, about confidences likely to have been made me by your mother on Harry's account?"

"Simply that, as she called in your influence to mediate between my brother and father about the partnership in the bank—and successfully, as it appears, on one side—I thought it probable she might have been more explicit with you than myself concerning the origin of Harry's indisposition."

"What the deuse! is he *ill*, then?" cried the colonel, becoming more interested in a conversation which at first appeared only a little outburst of fraternal spleen on the part of the handsome captain.

"Have you not heard it? No! by-the-way, I remember now, to my shame, that my mother begged me to say nothing to you on the subject."

"Nothing to *me?* why, surely, this mystery-mania is not becoming epidemic? Well, to be sure! If I find my dear good straightfor'ard Madam Hamlyn beginning to deal in zigzag, I shall feel sure that Truth has sunk much deeper out of sight than the bottom of a well!"

"To exonerate my mother," observed Walter, making so close a shave against the wheel of an omnibus at Battle Bridge, that involuntarily the colonel laid his hand upon the reins, "it is but fair to say that her reserve about Harry's altered state of health and mind arises from a sense of delicacy to others. My brother, it seems, has some strong attachment—"

"The deuse he has!"

"And an unprosperous one. In some way or other—but the *how* is precisely the point concealed from *me*—his compliance with my father's natural solicitude about the banking-house has been fatal to his hopes as a lover; and my mother declares that, since he gave in, he has been broken-hearted, broken-spirited, incapable of pursuing his studies. Instead of distinguishing himself and taking the high degree expected of him, his tutor has seriously recommended him to withdraw from college for a term, for the recovery of his health."

"God bless my soul! this is bad news indeed!" cried the colonel, sinking back into the corner of the cabriolet to collect his thoughts, with a view of retracing all he was hearing to the concealments practised upon him by his daughter-in-law concerning her intimacy with Henry Hamlyn, and, after some minutes' cogitation, giving it up as a bad job; so hard a matter was it, to his simple mind, to dive intc motives or connect a broken chain of evidence, where his affections were concerned. "And what does your father say to it all?" resumed he, after a long pause.

"Nothing; for no one dares molest *him* with the history of his son's qualms of conscience or dilemmas of the heart! My father is so very practical a man, and so unapt to allow his own feelings to interfere with the discharge of his duties, that it requires some courage to ask his indulgence for any frailty of the kind."

"But if this attachment of your brother's be of an objectionable nature—"

"Of course it is," interrupted Walter Hamlyn, warmly, "or he would not have presumed to make a confidante of my mother!"

"That's true, indeed! Then, by George! I'll speak to Hamlyn about it myself!"

"As we know nothing certain on the subject, interference might, perhaps, do more harm than good," observed his companion, afraid of the evil influence which Colonel Hamilton's want of tact might produce over the destinies of poor Henry. "My father would be furious at the idea of a young fellow of his age pretending to form a serious attachment. Why, even I, whose prospects are so much more positive than Henry's—"

"Well, even *you?*" cried the colonel, perceiving him hesitate, as if afraid of having gone too far.

"Even I, my father says, must not venture to think of marrying, unless I can make up my mind to an interested connexion."

"*Sell* yourself, eh? By George! Ellen is right! The trade of banking incrusts a man's soul with a yellow leprosy. However, I can't fancy that Hamlyn, who professes so warm a friendship for me, would take offence at my suggesting to him that his son wants respite and recreation. It would be a sin that Harry should lose all the ground he has been gaining as one of the first scholars in the land, only that his father might have a little work taken off his hands a few months sooner than he wishes."

"If you succeed in persuading him, you would do us all a genuine kindness," cried Walter. "Harry is a noble fellow, sir! as you said just now of my friend Dartford; and the mere idea of his being over-weighted in study, in order to gratify the vanity of his friends, or satisfy the impatience of my father for his assistance in the banking-house, is a real affliction to me."

"Suppose we push on to Lombard-street, then, after I've settled my business at Rundell's?" said the colonel. "I can make a pretence of wanting money to pay for my purchase, and so have a few minutes chat with your father in his sanctum. He'll fancy I was afraid of alarming your mother by speaking out this morning in Cavendish Square."

"With all my heart!" replied Captain Hamlyn, touching the flank of his fine horse as they emerged from Gray's Inn Lane; and the noble animal evinced some symptoms of displeasure at finding himself arrested in his speed by brewers' drays and other unaristocratic vehicles, strange in shape and alarming in sound to an habitual lounger of the ring. In spite of the hurry and tumult surrounding him, the colonel soon sunk into a revery, whereof Henry Ham-

lyn and his lovely daughter-in-law supplied the absorbing interest.

Who does not know, or, rather, who *did* not know, the glittering fishes of Ludgate Hill, presiding over the doorway of that temple of pomps and vanities, which, after aiding to bribe thousands of precious souls to perdition—damsels, per force of diamond necklaces, and diplomats, per force of diamond snuff-boxes—while making the fortune of half a dozen partners, has disappeared from the face of the commercial earth, leaving its high priests in the House of Commons, to be hereafter translated, perhaps, to the House of Peers!

Into the inner sanctuary of this gorgeous tabernacle did Walter Hamlyn conduct Colonel Hamilton, ensuring him all the deference awaiting the friend of a son of Hamlyn the banker, the future brother-in-law of a marquis, whose family diamonds were resetting in the house.

To customers of such importance, it was of course essential to display a thousand things they did *not* want, in place of the one asked for; and instead of teapots, forks, and spoons, the colonel, accordingly, found himself called upon to admire gilt candelabra on their way to the palace, and pieces of presentation-plate, in the form of vases, groups, shields, salvers; each purporting to be a tribute of respect, by private subscription, to the most virtuous, most able, or most active of the human race. The genuine exclamations of wonder and delight of the worthy nabob were so vociferous as to cause the cheeks of the apathetic man of Crockford's to tingle with shame, as well as to justify the shopmen in farther exhibitions while Captain Hamlyn was engaged in the execution of his brother-in-law's commission; exhibitions ending with the purchase of an opal bracelet for his daughter-in-law, and a diamond fan-mount for the marchioness elect, which Colonel Hamilton was easily persuaded were the most elegant and fashionable trinkets that ever dazzled the eyes of an enlightened public.

"To think what elements of human happiness are lying swamped and hoarded up in yonder Vanity-fair!" ejaculated he, as they took their places again in the cabriolet, after issuing instructions for the engraving of the teapot with the crest they *conceived* must be the Markhams', as figuring on a very extraordinary-looking gig which had been dying a natural death by inches in the open coach-shed of Ovington Vicarage, for the last half dozen years. "Why, if the plate, on sale or in deposite there, were melted down, and the jewels sold at prime cost, one might buy up St. Giles's with the proceeds; and establish on the spot an Irish city of refuge, too clean, airy, light, and decent for people to die in of drunkenness or typhus, or cut each other's throats for pastime!"

"I fear it will not do to refine on such points of moral economy!" replied Walter. "I fancy that, to complete the balance of society, we must have both diamond setters and rookeries."

"To complete the balance of society *as at present constituted!*" interrupted the colonel. "But things may mend! Your grandchildren may see (for, though I'm to be the last of my race, I suppose you won't) the institution of sumptuary laws; or, maybe, a scientific discovery for the chemical creation of diamonds, neutralizing their value. There may be a philosopher's stone in the crucible yet! The light ages may discover what the dark ones failed to put together; and 'tis *my* opinion, that if all these metropolitan colleges and universities, conservative or destructive, don't manage to blow-pipe us a new metal or two, in addition to their new gases, they're not worth their brick and mortar!"

"Still, luxury would assume some other shape!" pleaded Walter.

"Luxury itself may become vulgar!" cried the colonel. "The march of enlightenment may *make* it vulgar. *There* would be a triumph for the Great Unwashed! Why, after all, Watty, Time is only a great rubbish-hole, which mankind are always labouring to fill up with dust and ashes—broken prejudices and fragments of old abuses—in order to create a solid level for future ages to walk steady upon, eh? But, by George, one musn't be too speculative here, in Lombard-street; or we may chance to get shot out on the pavement, and find a level more solid than agreeable! Shan't you come in with me at the bank?"

"If you give me leave, I will wait for you in the cab. My presence would be a constraint upon your conversation with my father," replied Walter, drawing up before the door of Hamlyn and Co.

A couple of minutes, however, after Colonel Hamilton had disappeared through the oaken swing-doors with their brass network, one of the junior clerks made his appearance (taking his pen from behind his ear, out of respect to his employer's son and heir, as any other man would have touched his hat), begging, in Colonel Hamilton's name, that Captain Hamlyn would please to step out, as he wished to speak with him.

Walter had nothing to do but comply; though he had a particular objection to exhibit his *recherché* style of dress and admirable getting-up to the wonder or sneers of his father's sober house of business; and, on reaching the compting-house, he had the additional vexation to find the concession superfluous.

"Why, Hamlyn's not come to business yet!" said Colonel Hamilton; "and all his clerks seem to think he's been run away with by the old brown horse, who's as likely to have taken a start as Meux's brewhouse! However, I've put the head-clerk (that smooth-tongued fellow with a bald head) out of his pain, by telling him your father is only gone to his lawyer's in Norfolk-street; and, as the consultation must have lasted this hour and a half, he can't be much longer. So we'll even wait for him in his room."

Walter would much rather have retreated to his cab. But he saw that the eyes of all the clerks (except one or two who were engaged in noting the items of an account or numbers of a note, with their finger on the numerals) were fixed admiringly upon him, while Spilsby stood surveying his inches with as close a scrutiny as though he were measuring him for a coat, and, consequently, had not courage to contend against his companion's decision. In a moment they were ushered by Spilsby into the banker's room—cold, neat, sunless, dull—with its eternal half-dozen horse-hair chairs, its faded writing-table, and oldfashioned silver standish.

"And you wonder that I should have disliked the idea of wasting my life in this dreary den?" exclaimed Walter, casting his eyes round the untempting scene of his father's daily labours.

"Indeed I don't! I only wonder that *you* should presume to wonder at Harry's entertaining the same antipathy."

The expression of his surprise was silenced

by the re-entrance of Spilsby, who came to bring Colonel Hamilton the three hundred and fifty pounds he had asked for, and request his signature to the receipt. And lo! just as the colonel, after having had the notes told into his hand by the pragmatical clerk, had thrust them somewhat irreverently into his pocket-book, and his pocket-book into his pocket, the door was sharply opened, and Hamlyn made his appearance, with a face nearly as colourless as the paper of the notes! With a single glance, he examined the countenance of the three—his son, his client, and the clerk—who had intruded into his dwelling the preceding night. Having already learned in the compting-house that they awaited him together within, he trembled to surmise the motives which might have united such a heterogeneous assemblage.

That one look sufficed! Walter was disposed to salute with unusual tenderness the father, the disagreeables of whose habits of life were displayed around him in such prominent relief; while as to the colonel, the idea of having money in his pocket which was about to melt out of it in payment for gifts to three of the people he loved best in the world, imparted a double share of benignity to his comely countenance. With respect to the clerk—who could pretend to decipher the ambiguous expression of so mere a mask! At all events, however hostile Spilsby's ulterior intentions, his master saw that, at present, all was safe.

Meanwhile, the mood of the banker was very different from that in which, two hours before, he had made his agitated exit from his house in Cavendish Square. He had been spending the interim in one of the spots where his person was sacred as those of the gods, and his *ipse dixit* as authoritative. The house of Wigwell and Slack fattened upon the litigations and legalizations of that of Hamlyn and Co., as certain insects on the trees from whence they imbibe their pitiful vitality. The constituents of the banker progressed into the clients of the solicitor; the latter being as much the obedient, humble servant of the former, as the oak-apple is fluttered resistlessly about by every vibration of the oak on which it is incrusted. Hamlyn was, in short, the sun in whose rays, reflected in the golden sands, the crocodiles' eggs of the law were hatched into existence.

It necessarily followed that though, in support of his unblemished reputation as a great London banker, he maintained in his transactions with them the tone of the rigidly upright man—the punctual, methodical Mr. Hamlyn—he was often obliged to insist upon the prosecution of petty delinquencies; often compelled to borrow the strong arm of the law to crush those wretched vermin, those poor defaulters, called needy men, who, if suffered to prey unmolested, would become fatal in the moneyed world as the legions of rats which in Whittington's time devoured the substance of the King of Barbary. This, though a necessary, was not a flattering occupation; and, after the endless unsavoury conferences which Hamlyn was forced to hold with Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, it was like "music after howling" to listen to the recital of the Dartford rent-roll, in connexion with the marriage settlements of his "right honourable daughter." After the villanous John Doe and Richard Roeisms—the processes of outlawry—the persecutions, prosecutions, and incarcerations—which constitute the killing and wounding of financial fight, to hear of an estate set apart in the days of King Stephen for the dowry of the "Baronesses of Darteforde" being taxed for the future maintenance of a spinster named Lydia Hamlyn, was a satisfaction indeed!

But this was not all! Scarcely had he crossed the threshhold of his house in Lombard-street, when he was accosted with the glad tidings that a Riga house, whereof that of Hamlyn and Co. held bills to the amount of £10,000 (concerning which unsatisfactory rumours had been for a week past prevalent in the city), was not only solvent, but that the report which had created so much consternation in his mind bore reference to another Schreiber and Co., of Archangel, with whom they had no concern. Had the head-clerk been in the compting-house at the moment of his transit, this gratifying intelligence might have been held suspended over his head. But Spilsby being engaged with Colonel Hamilton, one of the juniors—one of those who loved and was grateful to his master—communicated the glad tidings, breathless with the joy he was about to impart.

The tranquillized banker was accordingly able to listen with exemplary serenity to the representations of Colonel Hamilton; and as it happened to suit his plans that Henry should not commence his duties in the House till after the ensuing Christmas, he had no difficulty in sitting down before them to indite a most paternal epistle to his son, offering him every pecuniary facility towards absenting himself from Cambridge for six months, for the recovery of his health, by perfect leisure or Continental travel.

For this sacrifice, he was more than repaid by the affectionate warmth with which Walter started up to press the hand which had been engaged in conferring a benefit upon his brother; while old Hamilton rubbed his own with glee at the idea of the surprise which Harry's unexpected arrival in town would occasion to Ellen, and the joy which Ellen's surprise might be made to produce for Harry.

"You're made of more penetrable stuff than I took ye for, my dear Hamlyn!" cried he. "But I fancy the best way we can reward you for proving so tractable a soul, is by making ourselves scarce. So give me the letter, and I'll post it as we go home."

"Are you afraid I should repent, and recall it, or that it will not be safe in our letter-box?" demanded the banker, with a smile of arch urbanity.

"Neither one nor t'other! But I'm come to an age when a bird in hand is worth *ten* in the bush; which is the reason I'm not sorry we're to see the colour of my friends Moonjee and Company's hundred and twenty thousand pounds, before another month goes over our heads! So now, good-by t'ye."

Released from this gratuitous tie upon his time, the banker was preparing to apply himself to the daily business which his unusual absence left at odds, enjoying in every fibre the delicious consciousness of relief from pecuniary pressure, and the golden gleams afforded by the vista opened by Colonel Hamilton's expectations and the Dartford connexion, when the white head of the old gentleman was again thrust in, with "Another word with ye, Hamlyn! Your clerks yonder are sending off a poor fellow, on the plea of your being engaged, whom I've a notion you won't be sorry that I've laid my hands on!"

As he spoke, the colonel again advanced into the room, followed by Walter, and a stout looking man in a round coat with corduroys and leather gaiters, whose costume afforded as singular a contrast to the trimly, well-cut gentility of Captain Hamlyn, as his wholesome, healthy, open countenance presented to the care-withered face of the slave of Mammon.

"Here, Durdan, here!" cried the colonel. "I told ye I thought we could pioneer the way into the presence of the great man!" And to Hamlyn's great annoyance, Colonel Hamilton evinced no intention of allowing the audience to be a private one.

"Sarvant, Mr. Hamlyn!" said the farmer, unhesitatingly taking the seat hesitatingly offered him by the banker, while the colonel resumed *his*, and Walter stationed himself on the hearth-rug, with ill-repressed impatience. "The col'nel here's been so friendly as to say you'd give me a hearing on a little bit o' business."

"With the greatest pleasure, Durdan!" replied Hamlyn, assuming an air of friendly affability, closely imitated from that with which, in Downing-street, he was usually accosted by Lord Crawley. "Is there anything in which I am able to serve you?"

"I'm obliged to you, sir, nothing! To speak plain, Mr. Hamlyn, I've railed it up from Ov'ngton mainly to be of sarvice to *you*. You've heard, no doubt, sir, that *my* matters be a going *contrairy*. But 'tis an ill wind as blows no man good; and I take it you'll be summut the better for Jacob Durdan's downfall."

"I am sorry to hear you apply so decided a word to your affairs," replied the banker, placing his hands with an air of dignified composure on the polished elbows of his arm-chair. "But I trust, Durdan, they may still look up."

"Not they, nor their master neither!" replied the farmer, doggedly.

"I am truly concerned to hear you say so, Durdan! but—"

"No great call, sir, for you to trouble yourself much about the matter!" interrupted the farmer, shrugging his shoulders, with the impatience of a man whom misfortune has rendered mistrustful of fine words. "You and I've been uncomfortable neighbours, Mr. Hamlyn. But that's over now! Shan't trouble nobody at Ov'ngton much longer with *my* company! So, whether you liked my dealings, or I yourn, don't much matter to neither."

"I can assure you, Durdan, that as far as regards that little trespass business—"

"No matter, sir, no matter! You stayed proceedings, at the request o' the good col'nel yonder, and there's an end on't! Maybe, if I'd been better up in the world, they'd never been begun."

But for the presence of Colonel Hamilton, the banker would probably have put a speedy end to an interview that opened so unsatisfactorily. But the old man kept nodding and winking beseechingly at him, in order to bespeak indulgence towards a poor fellow harassed by adversity out of his good manners.

"The thing's *this*, Mr. Hamlyn," resumed Durdan, after gulping down an uneasy feeling in his throat: "my farm's in the market; and—"

"You are looking out for a purchaser, eh! Durdan?"

"*Contrairy*, sir; purchasers be a looking out for *me*. There's Squire Barlow been a haggling with me, like a Jew pedler, ever since the news of my misfortun' (a'ter the burning o' the Liverpool warehouses, with my last consignment o' corn unensured); and I've a letter in my pocket from a Leamington 'torney, with an offer from one Sears, as has reilized a mint o' money in the licensed vict'ling line, and wants to set up for gemman, and build himself one o' them quality mousetraps they call a villa, on the ruins o' th' old farm!"

Richard Hamlyn majestically shifted the crossing of his legs at the idea of *such* a Shears, Esquire, established in a Shears Lodge under the very nose of Dean Park!

"Provided you get a long price for your land, Durdan," said Colonel Hamilton, "what's the odds? The colour of one man's money is the same as another's!"

"Why the odds is this, colonel!" replied the farmer, turning with a milder aspect towards the neighbour with whose partridges and pheasants he had been allowed to make acquaintance. "Ours ben't a county o' new-comers, colonel. You've seen the Bear and Ragged Staff monuments in War'ick Church, and the Vernon monuments at Brax'am? and you've, maybe, heard Squire Grat'ycke o' Grat'ycke tell of his ancestors being knights o' the shire summas about the time o' County Guy o' Guy's Cliff, or thereabouts. Even Squire Burlow, though forced to take wages as looker to Lord Vernin, have parchments to show for the lordship o' the manor of Ald'r'am, dating from days when papists and Protestants were roasting of one another in Smithfield Market. All this you know better nor I; for never was there a 'sizes these county gentlefolks didn't take care to din it in your ears!"

Walter Hamlyn began to testify signs of growing impatience by a vigorous poke of the fire; but his father looking round, quieted him by a glance of reproval.

"Well, sir! if so be these grander folks are proud o' having a deep-struck root in the county (for what roots be stronger than the dead we lay in the soil, from generation to generation?), *I've* just as great a call to think much o' the Durdans having been 'spectable yeomen on their own land, as *my* title-deeds will prove, from the time *my* ancestor joined old Crom'ell's at the battle of Edge'ill with his family and farming-men. Durdan's Farm, Mr. Hamlyn, has its name in the county as well as Ken'lworth or War'ick Castle; and if so be I'm forced by the badness o' the times to part with what's as close to me as the blood in my veins, I'd rather make a worse bargain, sir, and be sure th' old farm should stand, and th' old name o' Durdan's hold good, than have a pothouse-keeper's son making a heap o' rubbish o' the roof I was born under, and blotting my father's name out o' the county, as though 't had ought to be 'shamed on!"

"Bravo, Durdan! Well said, my old Trojan!" cried the colonel; "there's more pluck in that speech, man, than in all the gammon ever spouted on the hustings by all the Vernons in the shire! But can't matters be brought about, think ye, to prevent your parting with it at all? A mortgage—now? If a good heavy mortgage—"

"Thank ye, colonel—thank ye heartily and kindly," interrupted Jacob Durdan, in a more subdued voice, now that, having exhaled the spirit of his pride, the reality of his position forced itself anew upon his mind. "Everything's been done as *could* be done to put off the evil day—that is, everything in honesty. No doubt I might

shuffle on, with the chance o' coming to a break at last. But never should I get a wink o' sleep on my pillow, if I thought there was a chance of e'er a man living being the worse for my father's son! Mr. Hamlyn here can understand *that!* Mr. Hamlyn, who knows that the great name borne by Old England in her public dealings is maintained by the same proud feeling in the breasts of millions o' rough, hard-worded fellows, as little thought on as myself by lords and ladies!"

Thus appealed to, the conscience-stricken Richard Hamlyn muttered inarticularly one of those truisms about the unblemished national probity of Great Britain, which he usually reserved for his speeches from the chair at city meetings, or his place in the House of Commons.

"Case is this, col'nel!" resumed Durdan, turning short towards the only person present for whom he entertained sufficient respect to care about the impression he was making. "When my old father died, he left his matters at six and sevens. I was a young man, sir, with a family o' still younger brothers and sisters to purvide for; so, as in duty bound tow'rd the old man I'd laid in the grave, who'd fit a good fight for us all so long as body and soul held together, I worked hard for 'em all, and lived sparingly. And what's more, I guv up the thoughts o' marrying (as most young fellers o' my age have a mind to) till I'd put 'em all out in life; having first and foremost shackled myself with a knawing worm of a mortgage. For I didn't feel the property my own, so long as e'er a soul living had a right to say that old Jacob Durdan as was dead and gone had left a shilling in arrears. Till I paid my father's debts, I lived without salt to my porridge; but my porridge tasted none the worse for *that*, I promise you!"

By this time, the irritation of Richard Hamlyn was excited almost beyond bounds by the schooling of these cruel rebukes, and the more so, that he saw even the levity of his son subdued into respect towards the honest man before him; while Colonel Hamilton kept passing his hand across his shaggy eyebrows in a manner which there was no sunbeam straggling into that dull, dreary apartment, satisfactorily to account for.

"And so, gen'lemen," resumed Durdan, "finding that late and early work—saving and sparing—don't suffice to make head again the badness o' the times, sooner than bring matters to the last extremity and disgrace to an honest name, by getting into the Gazette, I've made up my mind to sell—pay every shillin' in the pound—and as to living on a crust, why that I've done already, without grumblin'! And knowin' Squire Hamlyn was once thinkin' o' the farm, and that if we come to a deal he would be for keepin' up th'old homestead, and leavin' it th'old name o' Durdan's farm, so that my nephys and nieces may know, fifty years hence, there was *once* a property in the family where their forefathers was born and died on their own belongin's, I've give no answer to Burlow, nor to Shears's 'torney, nor asked nobody to look about for a purchaser, 'fore I inquired if so be it suited *you*, sir, to come down with the money."

Richard Hamlyn budged not so much as an eyelash in reply to this appeal; for, with the incredulity of a grovelling mind towards every nobler sentiment, *he* doubted not that the rude eloquence of Jacob Durdan was a *get-up*, in hopes to raise the price of his farm.

But Colonel Hamilton was more generous. Steering the intermediate course between the severity of a man of business and the tenderness of the man of feeling, he inquired, in plain English, the value set by the farmer upon his property.

"You must tell us exactly what you ask for the old house and land, Durdan," said he, "before your proposals can be entertained."

"I know what old Squire Hamlyn offered my father for 'em," rejoined the farmer, "when first as ever he enclosed the Dean lands into a park. But land's worth half as much again nowadays, let alone that the farm's gained a mint in value by that same enclosure. However, I'm no great dab at figures, or maybe I should have made a better job o' my affairs; and the best way o' coming to the pint as to price, gen'lemen, is to show you Squire Burlow's offer, and the letters o' the Leamington 'torney, leaving you to judge what offers you choose to make. On'y not to misguide you with the notion that I want to ris the valu' upon you by the threat of an unpleasant neighbour, I tell you fairly, Mr. Hamlyn, that though at sixes and sevens in my accounts, I'd sooner take a trifle less from *you* than more from either o' t'others, on the consideration as afore mentioned."

"And I can candidly assure *you*, Durdan," replied the banker, gravely, "that had it suited me to make the purchase at all, a few hundreds, more or less, would not have been the object to deter or encourage me. But I am sorry to say, the disastrous position of the commercial world compels every man engaged in business to hold his resources at his disposal; and, even if the present depreciated value of agricultural produce were not sufficiently alarming to all landed proprietors, I should—"

"In one word, sir," said Durdan, rising from his seat, and buttoning up the coat which the rousing fire stirred up by Captain Hamlyn had compelled him to open in the heat of his explanations—"in one word, you're not disposed to come down? Well, sir, in that case, having done my dooty to all parties, I have only to close with the gen'leman in the 'Delphi, to whom Squire Burlow's referred me as empowered to examine the title-deeds for Lord Vernin. No offence, sir, I hope, for 'trudin' on your time; and I wish you heartily your health, Colonel Ham'lton, in case I should be out o' the country afore your return to the manor! If I might make bold, and the breed o' white peacocks could be accept'ble, col'nel (which you and the young lady admired so much the day you druv' over to Durdan's), I would ask you the favour, col'nel, to let me send 'em over to Burlin'ton in place o' being sold with the stock?"

While Colonel Hamilton was thankfully acknowledging this farewell act of neighbourly courtesy on the part of the unfortunate farmer, the mind of Richard Hamlyn was becoming distracted between the idea of the molestations likely to be practised upon him by Barlow of Alderham, fighting under the flaunting banner of all the Vernons, and his dread least the prying Spilsby should be at that moment stationed between the double doors dividing the compting-house from the parlour, obtaining farther insight into his financial dilemmas. He was roused from his abstraction by the voice of Walter.

"Might it not be as well, sir," inquired his son, "to think over these proposals, with reference to the Burlington property, if not to your own? Surely, at all events, among your money-eyed friends, it might be possible to find an ad-

vantageous purchaser for Durdan's, more agreeable to your feelings than either this Leamington innkeeper, or the agent of Lord Vernon?"

"Mr. Durdan, you see, is pressed to conclude the business," replied his father, much vexed that the explanation of so intimate a portion of his private affairs should have been disentangled in presence of his son and Colonel Hamilton. "I should otherwise have been glad to take the matter into consideration."

"My father would be glad to take the matter into farther consideration, sir," hastily repeated Captain Hamlyn, interrupting the civilities exchanging between Jacob Durdan and his Lord of the Manor. "Would it be inconvenient to you to leave the matter open for a day or two?"

"I couldn't, in course, Capt'n Hamlyn, expect a gentleman to be ready with his 'ay' or 'no" at a pinch, in a matter of so many thousands," replied the farmer. "Inconvenienced I *must* be, any way. But if the colonel here will answer for't to give me Squire Hamlyn's answer, by letter, by Thursday's post, I'll neither meddle nor make with the men o' business in the interim. I know very well that if once a plain man like me gets springed in the noose of their palaver, his neck will be wrung round, or a nail druv through his words, afore he knows where he is; and so, in course, I'd rather deal with gentlefolks whose yea is yea, and nay is nay! What say, colonel? Will you stand my friend so far as act atween me and the squire?"

"With all my heart, Durdan!" cried the good old man. "I'd give a groat you were able to stand the upshot, and keep the farm in your hands; but if not, God forbid I should have my keepers snarling and yelping from month's-end to month's-end like their own terriers, with e'er a Jack in office in the employ of my lord paramount of the Hyde! And now, let's all be off and leave this gentleman to his concerns! You'll find Johnson and his wife at the Hotel in St. James's-street, if you'll look in; though, by George, they'd be puzzled to offer you such cheer as you set afore me and Ellen the day we called upon you at the farm. Hamlyn! your servant! *This* time I promise you that my good-by is as earnest as your own acceptance across a bill. Walter my boy! I'm at your service."

CHAPTER XX.

"I have toil'd, and till'd, and sweaten in the sun
According to the curse: must I do more?
For what should I be gentle? for a war w
With all the elements, ere they will yield
The bread we eat? For what must I be grateful?
For being dust, and grovelling in the dust,
Till I return to dust?"—Byron.

A whole hour's deliberate consideration of these contending interests and embarrassments did not suffice to restore the banker's mind to composure. He saw clearly that his hesitation to effect a purchase so important to the value of his property as Durdan's farm, was likely to excite the surprise, and, eventually, the misgivings of both Colonel Hamilton and his son; and, difficult as it might be to complete the necessary arrangements at that moment, he felt that, if within the scope of possibility, the purchase ought to be accomplished.

Richard Hamlyn had now attained one of those exciting crises when a man is driven to attempt measures such as, in cool blood, he would repudiate as rash and unaccomplishable. Just as a physician will redeem at the last gasp, by some frantic stroke, the life of a patient with which for months he has been tampering—or, rather, just as a sleepwalker will direct his steps towards the broken bridge or crumbling wall, where those in full possession of their faculties must stumble, dizzed, into the abyss—did the banker suddenly make up his mind to an act of desperation.

"That man secured, all might yet be well with me!" was his train of reasoning. "Recruited by these timely succours, and having the certainty of a noble return from my South American speculations, I might yet replace all the missing securities—the Burlington Trust-money—Hamilton's—*all* my liabilities—if I could secure the silence of Spilsby, and, consequently, time for my affairs to come round. Something must be done! To struggle day after day within the coil of that domestic serpent, I neither can nor will. I feel blasted in mind and body by his pestiferous breath! A death by slow poison—a conscious death—a gradual decay of the flesh and the spirit, were not more loathsome than to be waited upon by his clammy touch, haunted by his stealthy tread, addressed by his meally voice, watched by his cunning eye. By the God of heaven! my breath seems stifled when I think upon him!"

And in the irritation of his soul, with a sudden jerk he pulled the bell beside his writing-table.

"Send Spilsby hither!" cried he, to the counting-house footman, who answered his summons, with a coalscuttle in his hand.

The head-clerk, who, conscious for some days past of his extended and extending power over his employer, had noticed, with triumph, Mr. Hamlyn's dexterous avoidance of a *tête-à-tête*, could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears, when thus summoned to his presence! Delivering to one of the juniors the bill of exchange he was filling up for the signature of an expectant customer, he turned down the wrist of his coat, and settled his collar, as if proceeding to an audience of some man in power. The altered countenance of Mr. Hamlyn as he entered the counting-house in the morning had not been lost upon him. He felt confident that a decisive blow was to be struck between them. But, unlike his master, Spilsby's feelings were undisturbed by the prospect of the collision. *He* was as cool—as malignantly cool—as a

"Toad that under the cold stone
Days and nights hath, thirty-one,
Sweltering venom sleeping got!"

and it was with his usual hardened air of self-reliance he entered the parlour of the banker.

In the interim, though but the lapse of a few minutes had occurred, the agitation of Richard Hamlyn—the unusual agitation of that measured and imperturbable man—had attained a pitch which caused his heart to beat as with the strokes of a hammer, and sent all the blood within him throbbing into his head, till his shot eyeballs assumed a terrible appearance.

The moment the baldheaded clerk had closed the door cautiously behind him, Hamlyn advanced with hurried footsteps, bolted it, and put the key into his pocket.

"Sit down, sir!" said he, addressing the astonished clerk, in a hoarse voice—how different in tone from the conciliating blandishment with which for weeks past he had accosted him!

"Sit down, sir!" said he again, in a still more peremptory manner, perceiving Spilsby hesitate, not from respect, but the dread, perhaps, of seeing a knife glitter in the hands, or a pistol concealed under the blotting-book of the desperate man he was confronting. "It is time that you and I understood each other!"

The baldheaded clerk began to mutter something about his earnest hope that no misunderstanding had ever occurred, or was likely to occur, between them.

"None! I shall take care that *none* occur!" said Hamlyn, in the same hoarse, unnatural, concentrated voice. "I *know* that you are my enemy. Your menacing looks pursue me to my calm fireside, molest me in the bosom of my family, frustrate the discharge of my parliamentary duties, and render my life a penalty and a curse! You could not suppose I should long endure this? As I said before, time we understood each other!"

"I should be extremely sorry, Mr. Hamlyn," faltered the clerk, affecting to humour the distracted mood of his employer, "if any inadvertence in my conduct has given rise to impressions of failure of respect."

"You lie, sir!" interrupted the banker. "There has been *no* inadvertence. Your least movement is calculated—your slightest word instinct with cunning! I see through you, Spilsby—see through you like a pane of ill-favoured, cloudy glass! And you fancy you see through *me*, in return. But you are mistaken! There are recesses in *my* mind and conduct which one like you can never penetrate; and into those I am at any moment able to dive, and defy your detection! Do you hear me, Mr. Spilsby?—*to defy your detection!*"

The interpellation seemed almost needful; for the head-clerk had the appearance of being stultified by the sudden explosion of this unlooked-for storm. It was the first time in the course of their long connexion that he had seen the banker in the slightest degree disturbed; and to behold him thus palpitating and convulsed by struggling passion, was as if the gates of hell had suddenly opened before him.

"I tell you," persisted the banker, coming closer towards him, and lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper, as if it suddenly occurred to him that the conference might be overheard by others as crafty as themselves, "I tell you that, like the fish which, when pursued, has the faculty of discolouring the surrounding waters to baffle its enemies, were you to execute your evil designs towards me, I would so perturb and trouble all which surrounds me, that *you*, sir, *you* yourself, should be involved, within an inch of the gallows, in our common ruin! This is no jest, sir, no idle menace! You have no more conception of the extent to which my schemes extend than you have of the nature of your share in the embezzlement which, at this moment, places you in my power!"

At this accusation, every vestige of colour forsook the cheeks and lips of Spilsby. Though an artful, he was by no means a strong-minded man; nor, indeed, have powerful minds *ever* resort to the cunning which characterized his habits. He was accordingly overawed by the audacity of Hamlyn's tone, and the ferocity of his denunciations! With the worst opinion of his employer, he believed him capable of having placed the golden cup in the mouth of Benjamin's sack, for the purpose of accusation. By what effort of legerdemain Hamlyn had replaced the missing securities, justifying such bold defiance, he could not conjecture. But he had little doubt that the same nefarious machinations which had extricated the banker might have transferred suppositious guilt to himself!

"I can assure you, sir," pleaded he, with the humblest deprecation, "that I am neither your enemy nor your defrauder. If I have been so unfortunate as to offend you by declining the consular appointment you were so generous as to procure me, I am willing to prove my zeal by accepting it."

"A well-imagined submission, truly, knowing that it is filled up, and your chance wasted! No, sir! It would no longer suit me to lose your valuable services; that is," continued Hamlyn, with a grim smile, "to lose sight of you! *Here* you must abide, Mr. Spilsby. You told me, the other day, that such was your wish—that you desired no better. Your ambition shall be fulfilled! And now, listen to me—listen to a plain statement which involves the vital interests of your future destinies! You fancy you have a hold over me; that I have committed myself by lapses of discretion—nay, why not speak out?—breaches of honesty—of equity—that place me in your power. Suppose this granted! What do you pretend to gain by the denunciation? Will my customers thank you for the announcement of the abstraction of what you have it not in your power to replace? If this house were closed to-morrow, what are you the better for its bankruptcy? You lose your salary, your situation, your respectability. Other houses of business would be cautious of engaging a head clerk out of a house that had disgraced itself; more especially a Judas—a Judas, sir—who has attempted to sell his master. You would be placeless, homeless, friendless; ay! and, in the sequel, perhaps, emulate the tardy repentance of that same Iscariot, *who went and hanged himself!*"

"If I entertained any views or intentions, sir, of the vile nature to which you advert," said Spilsby, in a low, broken tone—for he was thoroughly unmanned—"I should deserve these insinuations. But really—"

"If you do *not*," retorted Hamlyn, "you will have the less hesitation in acceding to the terms I am about to propose to you. Your salary in my establishment amounts, I fancy, to four hundred per annum?"

"To four hundred."

"It is my intention to double it. I have here a paper awaiting your signature. It contains only a few lines, and need cost you little deliberation. You will find yourself required to pledge yourself to secrecy, public and private, with regard to the affairs of the house (which you admit to be fully known to you), on condition of receiving the sum of eight hundred pounds per annum, paid quarterly; and a farther douceur of two hundred guineas, every Christmas, according as you may refrain from annoying and harassing me by petty irritations. If you fancy me likely to compromise our mutual animosity by a large sum in ready money, you are mistaken. I have neither the power nor the will. Make up your mind, therefore, to accept a handsome competence—one thousand a year—at my hands, so long as the house shall keep open; or do your worst—ruin *it* and *me*, if you can—and abide the consequences which I swear to you are at this moment impending over your head!"

The clerk almost gasped for breath. There was something in the desperation of Hamlyn that seemed to cleave him to the earth! His tongue grew dry within his mouth, till he was almost incapable of utterance. To have called for help, overmastered the incensed man before him, and exposed to the arbitration of the law the antagonism between them, would only accelerate the catastrophe of which he stood in awe. Spilsby felt convinced that, at his first movement, the frantic banker would rush upon him and lay him dead at his feet!

On the other hand, the terms of pacification offered him, exceeded his hopes. Without foreseeing exactly to what degree he might implicate himself in a felony by his avowal of participation in the previous acts of Hamlyn and Co., the prospect of an income of a thousand a year was *El Dorado* to the clerk. Pentonville and lodgings disappeared before him. He saw himself grown "respectable"—a householder—living cleanly and "keeping a gig;" bringing up his sons to the learned professions, and his daughters at a genteel boarding-school!

Richard Hamlyn saw plainly the advantage he had gained. Already his heel was upon the head of the serpent!

"Your stipend is due on the first of next month, I think?" said the banker. "The first quarterly instalment lies before you," said he, placing two hundred-pound notes beside the paper he had hastily drawn up, "the receipt of which you will have the goodness to acknowledge on the same sheet. Make up your mind, Mr. Spilsby! I have no time to throw away upon its vacillations."

The baldheaded clerk cast a hurried, haggard glance around the chamber, as if expecting its dingy walls to emit counsellors for his dilemma. Bewildered as he was, he would have given half the amount before him for an hour's leisure for the arrangement of his ideas. But this delay squared not with the policy of his master. Five minutes afterward, the notes were in Spilsby's pocket; the paper, duly signed, was deposited in the desk of the banker, and a mountain removed from the breast of Richard Hamlyn!

"And now, Spilsby," said he, with difficulty restraining his desire to cry aloud for joy in the fulness of his heart, when, released from its agonizing tension, the blood gradually returned to its usual channels, "we perfectly understand each other. If not friends, we are at least confederates for life—confederates whose well-being is bound up in mutual conciliation. I shall receive you with all the consideration due to your confidential position in my establishment, with more than you ever received at my hands. Be all trace of this interview banished between us! Nothing on *my* part shall ever recall a disagreeable impression to your mind. From *you* I expect similar forbearance."

"I trust, sir, I shall never lose sight of the deference becoming my helpless dependance upon you!" replied Spilsby, gradually recovering the power of thinking, feeling, and speaking for himself. "I would fain this explanation had never taken place. But I have had no choice in the matter. All I can now desire is that it may be obliterated from your remembrance, as I shall strive to efface it from mine."

Thus ended this fearful struggle for life and death; and no one who saw Richard Hamlyn that afternoon, sedate and courteous, upon 'Change, receiving the congratulations of his intimates on the good news from Riga, and exchanging with the mere men of business with whom he was in connexion the usual forms and negotiations of the day—while stockbrokers respectfully uncapped as he glanced their way, and many a grayheaded man of double his years stood aside with reverence for the passage of the righteous-overmuch promoter of half the charitable institutions of the metropolis—would have assigned the smallest credit to the asseverations of the baldheaded clerk, had he sworn on the Gospels, in presence of the assembled magistrature of the city, to the truth of the scene described in the foregoing pages!

But life is full of contradictions. Could we behold the individuals with whom we live in habits of social intercourse, in the closer relations of life and at all hours of the day, how few of us but would start back with surprise, in many instances with horror, on recognising our utter ignorance of their real natures and pursuits! Nor is this altogether the result of human hypocrisy; human folly has a considerable share in the illusion. We see people through the medium of our prejudices as often as through that of their pretensions; endowing them with imaginary virtues for our worship, or supposititious vices for our abhorrence; and, when disabused in our gratuitous error, visit upon *them* the flights of our imaginations. Yet the lover who chooses to elevate the lady of his thoughts into a divinity has no right to resent her proving herself a mere mortal; nor the public to create unto itself idols, for the mere purpose of knocking them into dust in the sequel, as mere puppets of wood or images of clay.

It was scarcely the fault of the honourable member for Barsthorpe, if the London world, after admiring for twenty years the excellence of his establishment, the perfection of his equipages, the activity of his parliamentary career, the liberality of his private—knowing him to be neither a libertine, a gambler, a sot, nor a spendthrift (the frailties most common in connexion with capital dinners and a knowing turnout)—should choose to elevate him into the most virtuous of mankind—one who might have been Bishop Heber the Apostle, had he not been Hamlyn the banker!

The dinner-party which took place that very day in Cavendish Square was citable for its elegance and pleasantness, even among the many brilliant banquets succeeding each other at what the newspapers chose to term "the hospitable family mansion of Mr. Hamlyn." The party was not large. The Marchioness of Dartford, an habitual invalid, disliking noise and strangers, was charmed with the gentle serenity of Mrs. Hamlyn, and the ladylike propriety of her new daughter-in-law, of whom, by-the-way, Lady Rotherwood did the honours to her sister as though she were showing off a child of her own. Colonel Hamilton and Ellen, with Lord Crawley and Walter, completed the party; and Lord Vernon might have judged it a sufficient reason for dismissing his French cook, and renouncing forced fruit and vegetables for the remainder of the season, could he have witnessed the perfection of gastronomy demonstrating the vulgarity of an enjoyment thus emulated by an upstart like the money-broker of Dean Park.

Colonel Hamilton whispered to himself more than once in the course of the entertainment, that even Ormeau could not pretend to rivalship with the banker in the art of dinner-giving; and

on such an occasion as the present, where the parties so well understood each other and were so perfectly happy, there was not room for the only deterioration ever perceptible at his table, namely, a certain formality arising from want of harmony and assortment among the guests. Lord Crawley, who had not seen his sister since her dangerous illness, seemed to take particular delight in a reunion occurring under circumstances so auspicious. The home secretary, always sociable, was unusually anecdotic and agreeable; either in compliment to the happy position of his nephew, as an object of disinterested affection in the bosom of such a family; or to the bright eyes of Mrs. Hamilton, whom he beheld for the first time, and hailed with enthusiasm as an animated muse, a model of all that was fair and noble, even before he discovered her to be the nominal heiress of the rich old nabob, who had given him so valuable a lesson in Indian policy, seasoned with elephantisms, at Dean Park.

"I believe you mean to provide wives for our whole family, my dear Mrs. Hamlyn!" whispered Lady Rotherwood to the banker's wife; while Lydia took her seat after dinner beside the *chaise-longue* on which her kind and admiring mother-in-law extended herself for a short repose previous to coffee. "Not content with finding the dearest little marchioness for my nephew that his wildest desires could have fancied, you have placed in my brother's way the only woman I ever saw likely to distract his attention from the interests of public life. I never knew Crawley smitten before!"

Mrs. Hamlyn smiled, and of course disclaimed, as she glanced towards Ellen, who, in order to allow more freedom of speech to the family party, had retreated into the little boudoir full of engravings, wherein that fatal compact had been made between the home secretary and the master of the house, the fearful consequences whereof were still concealed among the mysteries hidden in the lap of time. But the smile was a hollow one. Mrs. Hamlyn heard with the natural jealousy of a mother any allusion to a new conquest effected by the object of Henry's adoration; and though vexed, almost indignant, at noticing the profound attention paid by her eldest son throughout dinner to Mrs. Hamilton, beside whom he was seated, she felt doubly distressed at the idea of a preference on the part of Lord Crawley, so alarming to the hopes and happiness of her favourite child.

A new scene of triumph, meanwhile, was commencing for Lydia. The Marchioness of Dartford, an accomplished musician, and passionately devoted to the art, but debarred by the state of her health from attending operas and concerts, and, consequently, a stranger to the *chef d'œuvres* of modern harmony, was overwhelmed with delight at the masterly performance of her daughter-in-law. The duets from the "Lucia" and "Norma," executed by Lydia and Ellen with a degree of perfection rarely attained by non-professional singers, drew tears from her eyes; and before the close of "*Deh! con te*," Lord Crawley and Walter were standing with Dartford behind the piano, in ecstacies, real or pretended, almost as great as those of the genuine amateur, a circumstance laughingly pointed out by Colonel Hamilton to his friend the banker, as they entered the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room together.

Was it likely that a man thus situated—thus gloating in the enjoyment of every social pleasure, every social distinction—should have leisure to reflect on the morrow with due solicitude upon his responsibilities towards his hundreds of clients?—to ponder upon the interests of such people as the vicar's family, the children of a physician in Russell Square, the widow Darley in Lemon-tree Yard, or Sir Robert Maitland in the Hebrides; the annuity of Miss Creswell, the governess, or the compound interest of the Ovington Savings' Bank? Astonishing, indeed, had he so much as deigned to recognise the existence of such nonentities, while entertaining with *their* means, and by the wasting of *their* substance, the future relatives and present friends of the marchioness, his right honourable daughter!

"Has your ladyship heard that Hamlyn, the banker, is likely to be created Lord Scrip in the next batch of peers?" inquired Flimflam of Lady Vernon, beside whom he had manœuvred himself into a seat at dinner that day, at a dinner-party at the house of one of her Northumberland neighbours, in hopes of worming himself into her good graces hereafter, as a profitable dinner-giver and fashionable lady patroness.

"A joke, of course!" replied Lady Vernon, who, knowing Mr. Flimflam to be a person engaged to supply the small talk of dinner-parties, as Gunter is engaged to furnish bonbons for the dessert, conceived that such a man could not ask for bread without a latent pun.

"A jest exceedingly likely to prove earnest! It is amazing how those Hamlyns are getting on, and, we may add, their sons and daughters getting *off!* That pretty simple-looking daughter has entrapped the best match of the season; and the son is going to be married to a widow with twenty thousand a year, a woman who has lately refused some nobleman's son (I don't know whom, but a capital match), out of affection for the bright eyes of that silly young coxcomb, Captain Hamlyn of the Blues."

Lady Vernon winced. Her withers were grievously wrung. That very morning she had heard the first whisper of Alberic's humiliating rejection by Mrs. Hamilton, and had long begun to look upon Walter as a very passable *pis-aller* for Lucinda, in case the present season should prove as infructuous as the last. The heir of Dean Park was a bagged fox, whom it did them no harm to secure, in case better game were wanting.

"I must say," resumed Flimflam (a professional man of infinitesimal calibre), "that nothing appears to me more absurd than the position assumed in society by bankers, above any other species of mercantile men. Dealers in silver and gold are not a bit the less dealers because the queen's countenance is stamped upon their merchandise; and why we should see such people as the Hamlyns honoured by royal visits and invitations more than other commercial people—"

"Royal notice is often bestowed for specific purposes!" interrupted Lady Vernon, almost overlooking the audacity of the little insect who buzzed so familiarly in her ears, in consideration of the judgment with which his sarcasms were directed. "But I can assure you that, in the county in which Mr. Hamlyn's father chose to establish himself and purchase an estate, they are still looked upon in their true light of *parvenus*. Lord Vernon (their nearest neighbour) considers them highly-respectable people, who do much good in their way; but Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn stand in a very different light in their

country neighbourhood and among the London crowd, which has less time to take accurate measure of claims and pretensions."

"Oh! as to London," retorted Flimflam, "as your ladyship justly observes, in the present disordered state of the social system, people go where they are amused, without asking by whom or caring how. If Madame Laffarge were to open a fine house in Grosvenor Square, with the best music and best suppers of the season, she would be visited by everybody. At the end of a year or two, if her music and suppers became less good, they would begin to inquire *who* she was, and pretend that they had never heard of her name till she was forced upon their acquaintance by their friend Lady So and So. It is not every one who preserves, on such points, the rigid sense of dignity exercised in so exemplary a manner by your ladyship."

"What possible object could I have," gravely resumed Lady Vernon, "in cultivating the acquaintance of such people as the Hamlyns? They have everything to gain from *me*—I have nothing to gain from *them*."

"Why, as your ladyship justly observes," replied Flimflam, "the show and ostentation of such an establishment as theirs (devised, no doubt, as an advertisement in large capitals of the solidity of the firm) may be highly attractive to the vulgar, but is the very thing to disgust persons of genuine refinement! I have dined occasionally at Hamlyn's (with whom I have parliamentary business that necessitates a sort of acquaintance), and confess nothing strikes me more than the contrast afforded by his flashy table to those of certain old, and, if I may presume to say so, oldfashioned nobility, with whom I have the honour of dining, such as the Duke of Saxmundham, the Marquis of Oxgraze, the Earl of Titheprig—"

"The Duke of Saxmundham is an uncle of mine, Lord Titheprig is my brother-in-law!" observed Lady Vernon, fancying she was communicating news to Flimflam, who bowed in grateful acknowledgment, till his *toupet* touched the table-cloth.

"At Hamlyn's," resumed he, "one is absolutely dazzled by excess of light and the newness of the plate, as if the host cared only to prove the amount of his credit with his jeweller and wax-chandler! The comfort of his guests is never thought of. Shaded lights, that would fail to exhibit the lustre of his silver wine-cistern, such a man as Hamlyn would not hear of!"

"For my part, I detest that sort of over-polished, over-frosted fancy plate, which looks as if it had just been figuring in Storr and Mortimer's window!" sneered Lady Vernon. "It is like publishing by sound of trumpet that you are a man of yesterday, to exhibit such *very* new-fangled devices."

"Then, the dinner itself," resumed Flimflam (whose rancour was excited against Hamlyn by having had it repeated to him by his bosom enemy, the learned Theban of the Temple, that the banker had denounced him to Lord Crawley, on issuing from his last dinner-party, as "a failure —not so good as usual!"), "the dinner itself is in what I consider the worst taste! Everything garnished—everything *à la* some preposterous thing or other! Such gilding of refined gold, and painting the lily! *Turbot à la Tartare*, and *faisan à l'estragon!*—as if the simple flavour of the best things in the world were not sufficient to bribe the *beau monde* to dine with a banker!"

"I suppose *some* persons *are* tempted there in search of novelty," replied Lady Vernon, contemptuously. "People, tired of their plain roast venison at home, find amusement in exploring the eminent cooks of London—no matter with whom they may be living."

"And certainly, at Hamlyn's, one *is* sure of novelty!" observed Flimflam. "I recollect his giving us canvas-back ducks one winter, which he receives regularly from his correspondents at New-York."

"I suppose, then, there is a game-bag attached to his letter-bag?" observed Lady Vernon, with a sneer.

"And, as your ladyship is probably aware, he cultivates, in his succession-houses at Dean Park, a variety of tropical fruits, which are grown nowhere else in England: about as good eating as the waxen fruit of an epergne, with a little powdered sugar sifted over it."

"Very good things to exhibit at a horticultural show, in order that his own and his gardener's name may figure in the morning papers!" observed Lady Vernon. "But I own *I* am humble enough to be contented with a good Providence pine!"

"Even the pines at Hamlyn's," resumed Flimflam, "are served as I never saw them in any other house. The pine-stands are of gold, with long, burnished, pendent leaves, in the form of the natural fruit."

"Disgusting!" exclaimed Lady Vernon. "Nothing more offensive than contact between fruit and plate, which can only be cleared by substances fatal to the flavour. Fruit should be served exclusively on glass or china—"

"Not by a banker!" retorted Flimflam, with a venomous smile. "Gold (often, I am afraid, *gilding*) is the emblem of his calling—the outward and visible sign of his inward *dis*grace. For, after all, as your ladyship justly observes, what can be more suspicious of a great banker? By what means can it have been amassed, but able speculation with the fortunes of others; by the risk of what is not his own, and what, if lost, he is unable to replace? For what purpose do we intrust our property to a banker? To be taken care of, and rendered back on demand! If susceptible of being turned to account, the profit should be ours, or partly ours; otherwise, we incur the hazard without benefit in the gain. Coutts began life, we are told, with half a crown. How did he obtain his millions? By gaining the confidence of rich men, and the credit of a man possessing the confidence of rich men, till he held in his hands, in deposite, the means of indulging his genius for financial speculation. It *was* genius, and it prospered! But a blunder of Coutts's might have involved hundreds of families in ruin; whereas his prosperity enabled him to prove, by the alliances of his family, that the proudest colossal fortune (even if a *solid* colossal fortune, and not a mere colossal credit), that the most moral houses of the realm, will grovel in the dust at the foot of the altar of the golden calf!"

"Most true, indeed!" ejaculated Lady Vernon, beginning to discover eloquence in the rhapsodies of a man whose principles were so congenial with her own, and not stooping to reflect that the principles of a dining-outman are plastric to the prejudices of every house in which he is accustomed to pick up crumbs of cake and slices of venison.

"The fact is," resumed Flimflam, perceiving

that he was making an impression, "there are too many of these gilt counterfeits in society! *Far* too much glare, and bustle, and show has been introduced into the quiet resorts of the great world by indulgent toleration of these Brummagen pretenders. Like the vulgar *cornets à pistons* and Turkish cymbals, which have produced such deterioration in modern music, these people make too much noise. If I were to date the decline of taste in England in all matters of art or literature, it would be from the ascendency of the moneyed interests. A financial aristocracy, a nobility of the counter, encourages artists, but extinguishes art. Mozart has been out of fashion ever since seven bankers' wives had boxes in the grand-tier; and it is well known that Lawrence attributed the gimcrackery of his latter portraits to the evil influence of city patronage."

"It is certain," observed Lady Vernon, "that the Vandykes and Lelys, whose practice was confined exclusively to the court, produced a very different order of portrait from the Shees and Chalons, compelled to perpetuate the necklaces and guipure lace of Portland Place and Harley-street."

"Even as regards literature," added Flimflam, "just as all the unctuous dishes of the French *cuisine*, over-truffled and over-spiced, were invented for the *Fermiers Généraux* of the time of Louis XV., those dreadful, flimsy, flashy, unwholesome tissues of false sentiment and flippancy, called fashionable novels, were composed for the delight of the bankers' wives. A *ragoût tà la financière*, as I need not remind your ladyship, is a fricassee of coxcombs! The favourite works on the boudoir-table of the Hamlyn tribe are those gaudy fool-traps, the fashionable annuals."

"Too true!" replied Lady Vernon, beginning to wonder why she had always conceived such a dislike towards little Mr. Flimflam. "But, after all, may there not be miching malicho in all this? Are not these bankers interested in promoting a taste for every idle and useless expense which increases the value of money?"

"A most luminous idea—a most logical conclusion!" said Flimflam, gravely. "Many a political economist might envy the origination of such a theory, and Montesquieu has gained credit by axioms less profound. But are we not sometimes over-apt to impute designs to our neighbours? The policy of Russia, for instance. Which of us has not heard, as long as he can remember, of the designs of Russia? Whereas, as Lord Crawley observed to me when I was dining with him t'other day (and Lord Crawley may be esteemed something of an authority on such points!), if Russia *had* any marvellous designs, would she be fool enough to let us find her out?"

"What is that, my dear Flimflam?" inquired a distinguished opposition member seated near them, whose ear was caught by such mighty names as those of an empire and a home secretary.

"I was telling Lady Vernon," said Flimflam—enchanted to extend the circle of his auditors—"that the other day Lord Crawley was observing to me on the absurdity of attributing profound or crooked policy to the Russians, the most barbarously arbitrary of all European cabinets; a cabinet which belabours one *au moral* as it crushed Napoleon *au physique*, by the frozen hammer of Thor rather than by the polished steel of Machiavelism!"

"Rather a singular audacity of expression for Crawley!" observed the gentleman he was addressing, with an air of polite incredulity.

"I can, however, attest its authenticity, for he said it to myself!" replied Flimflam stoutly; thereby entitling the persons present to attribute in all companies to the Home Secretary a speech and sentiment in which his real share was in the proportion of one pennyworth of bread to a monstrous quantity of sack.

But, saving for such exaggerations and amplifications as this, and such rumours as that of the scrip peerage, what would become of the profitable occupation of the Pique Assiette, or diner-out! a moral *gargotier*, who lives by hashing up with spices and condiments, for the small-talk of his Saturday's dinner, the savoury morsels he has filched and carried away from the colloquial feasts of the preceding days of the week!

Verily, Flimflam had his reward! He was requested by Lady Vernon, in the course of the evening, to do her the favour of calling upon her in Grosvenor Place; and before four-and-twenty hours were over his head, had amused the dinner-table of a fox-hunting country baronet with an account of the absurdity of a certain ultra-fashionable Lady Vernon, who assured him—*him*, Erasmus Flimflam—that she had been forced to desert her old box at the opera, and ascend a tier higher, in consequence of the glare of the bullion and spangles displayed in the turbans and trimmings of the bankers' wives!

The following Sunday, the "familiar toad" assumed his place for the first time at the table of Lord Vernon, furnished with some capital impromptu anecdotes of Sheridan, Curran, and Horne Tooke, well adapted for the Whig atmosphere of the house; and the sowing of the dragon's teeth by Cadmus was not more fertile in the production of strife and warfare, than the tale-bearing and tittle-tattle of the habitual diner-out, as exercised that day in Grosvenor Place!

CHAPTER XXI.

"Sunshine and storm—th' alternate checker-work
Of human fortune!"—SHELLEY.

It was scarcely possible for a life of only four-and-twenty years' duration to present a succession of stronger contrasts than that of Mrs. Hamilton. The circumscribed horizon of her penury-stricken youth had been cheered by the affection of a mother in whose heart she reigned supreme; and when the epoch of first love, the brightest of woman's life, was darkened and depressed by the persecutions so wantonly inflicted by the banker, the faithful devotion of Robert Hamilton had proved a haven in the storm, an anchor of safety and salvation.

She was, consequently, fully justified in the faith, which most women, whether justifiedly or not, profess in their heart of hearts, that love is the surest of *human* consolations; and when trouble came again, and she found herself alone in the world, alone and exposed to the molestations which beset a woman so singularly beautiful, it was but natural she should accept with gratitude the homage of such an attachment as Henry Hamlyn's, as her best chance of restoration to worldly happiness.

But she deceived herself. Her future career was not to be as they had planned it together in that happy land, where love is prematurely ripened by the influence of language, climate, habits, manners—where every breath is a sigh and every word an endearment. They had agreed to enjoy together a life of study and seclusion, of modest competence, and mutual devotion. Instead of which, it was now decreed that they were to meet no more in this world; and Ellen, instead of becoming an obscure, laborious, adored and adoring wife, found herself suddenly elevated to the enjoyment of every earthly luxury, and the gratification of every earthly vanity and whim. Followed and flattered by those who were enabled to place her in the highest rank of English society, adorned by the fond generosity of the colonel with jewels and costly attire, she now possessed everything the heart of woman could desire, except the one thing needful, the object of her sole affection.

While the fashionable world was as usual taking fire with enthusiasm under the influence of a new beauty—while she was welcomed into such circles as those of Ormeau and Rotherwood House, with the utmost deference and adulation—her heart was wrung with a sense of its loneliness! The passion of a silly fop like Alberic Vernon was only a source of disgust; the affection of an amiable man like Lord Edward Sutton, a matter of regret. For her whole soul was still concentered in that silent, dreary chamber of the solitary student, who, if he had tacitly withdrawn the pledge of their trothplight, was not the less dear to every fibre of her heart.

To whatever place of public amusement poor Ellen was forced by the mistaken kindness of the good colonel, her thoughts were constantly wandering to the past, constantly distracted by surmises concerning the health and happiness of him whom, for a time, she had regarded as her husband. Though no longer able to attach a sentiment of personal pride to his college triumphs, she felt deeply mortified on learning from her father-in-law the sudden decline of his expectations, and from the moment tidings reached her of his indisposition, scarcely absented herself an hour from the company of Mrs. Hamlyn, so eager was she to obtain intelligence of the invalid.

Between these two women, united by a common object of boundless affection, not a syllable of explanation had been exchanged. Situated as they mutually were, it was impossible for one to say to the other, "Dear indeed would you have been to me as the wife of my son!" or for the other to whisper, "Fain would I have been to you as the fondest and most dutiful of daughters." But without a word spoken, they understood each other—appreciated each other—loved each other. When Ellen entered the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, with anxious looks, Mrs. Hamlyn took occasion to inform some other person present that she had heard from Henry—that Henry was better; and if Mrs. Hamlyn appeared too much out of spirits to attend some brilliant ball or gay party, Ellen would persuade Lydia to content herself with the *chaperonage* of Lady Rotherwood, and pretend a headache, in her turn, as an excuse for remaining at home with Mrs. Hamlyn.

Over their quiet work and tea-table, they never mentioned the name of Henry. Yet every syllable uttered between them bore indistinct reference to him or to his projects; and, in reverting to the past, though the affectionate mother spoke only of Walter and her daughter, not a trait she cited of them—not a nursery anecdote she recalled, but it was easy to discover the part which Henry had borne in the affair. It seemed almost as if, conscious of the distance which Lydia's happy marriage must create between her and her parents, Mrs. Hamlyn were securing to herself future consolation in the affections of a new daughter.

Colonel Hamilton saw all this, and saw it with the utmost satisfaction. The banker's wife was his model of womanly excellence; and he rejoiced that the Ellen in whom he was desirous of investing his whole stock of human affections, should modify the somewhat lofty tone of her character after the submissive gentleness of Mrs. Hamlyn. He fancied that the energetic disposition of his daughter-in-law might inspire her friend with courage for her approaching separation from the young marchioness; and if he indulged in ulterior projects concerning the motherly and daughterly affection arising between them, kept the secret strictly to himself.

"At present, not a word—at present mum! Ellen deserves some punishment," was the frequent result of his self-communing, "for entertaining so little confidence in the poor old man."

It was not always easy, however, to the candid veteran to conceal his participation in the secret so singularly revealed to him between his visit to Cambridge and the indiscretion of Walter; and, whenever he saw tears on the point of starting from the fine eyes of his beautiful daughter-in-law, he could scarcely forbear exclaiming, "Don't fret my dear, don't fret! True love seldom runs smooth, they say. But when two young folks are agreed, and money is not wanting, matters *must* come straight at last!"

Sometimes, when Ellen was in better spirits after one of her long interviews with Mrs. Hamlyn, he found it equally difficult to refrain from quizzing her concerning her flushed cheeks and unusual gayety.

"You look so blooming this morning, my dear Nelly," said he, one day on her return to the hotel after having officiated as *chaperon* to Lydia while sitting for her picture to Francis Grant, as a present for the Marchioness of Dartford, "that I could almost fancy it was *you*, and not Lydia, who had been spending a couple of hours with the eyes of her faithful swain fascinated upon her face! Pray, was Master Watty with you at Grant's?"

"I have not seen Captain Hamlyn these two days," replied Mrs. Hamilton, with some degree of resentment.

"Why, you won't pretend to tell me, my dear (for as tragedy queenish as you may choose to look on the occasion), that you are not aware the handsome captain is dying for love of you?"

"Not what *I* consider love. Captain Hamlyn treated me with distant civility till he saw me assume a better place in society than he supposed would be conceded to so insignificant a personage. It was not till I had been stamped current by the homage of a fashionable fribble, like Mr. Vernon, that he began to pay me attention; and Lord Edward Sutton's admiration was necessary to bring him to his present stage of gallantry."

"Well, well! whether his passion be natural or artificial, or, rather, whether it be spontaneous or derivative, admit that it becomes him admirably. Walter's the handsomest young fellow in

Lon'on, let t'other be whom he may; and I feel pretty sure that if he didn't bear the hateful name of Hamlyn (against which you seem to have set your obstinate little mind), you'd be acting Lady Bountiful, some twenty years hence, at Dean Park, long a'ter we old fogrums are dead and forgotten."

The fluctuating colour on the cheek of poor Ellen betrayed the emotions which the colonel had been maliciously bent upon calling forth by this exordium.

"But we're going to have a much worse specimen of the family on our hands shortly!" added the colonel, intently watching her. "The lad who's been sapping all this time at Cambridge, finding himself likely to make a bad job of it, chooses to sham ill; and his family have been gulled into persuading him, forsooth, to ask for holydays! For my part, I hate pedants, of every shape, sort, and size; and shan't find my way half so often to Cavendish Square, now that we're to have the drawing-room littered with Latin and Greek books, and the solemn phiz of a Mr. Gradus, established there in eternal rebuke of our ignorance. Just imagine *me*, who find it a hard matter to speak dictionary English, stuck up opposite a fellow who fancies he can decline his nouns and conjugate his verbs so much better than *his* neighbours!"

"I was well acquainted with Henry Hamlyn in Italy," said Mrs. Hamilton with a degree of effort that crimsoned her face as she attempted to raise her full-orbed eyes towards the searching glance of the colonel, "and can assure you, sir, that he is nothing of a pedant."

"Oh! he isn't, eh? Well, so much the better! And pray, is he as good-looking as Walter?"

"In my opinion, far handsomer, for he has an expressive and intellectual countenance; while the good looks of Captain Hamlyn are the mere result of features and complexion."

"A *favourable* result, at all events, as I suspect that pretty finical miss of Lord Vernon's is beginning to find out! Last night, when Watty was taking so much pains about finding that seat for you at the Ancient Concert, Lady Vernon and her daughter looked as if they would like to mince you into *very* small pieces. But tell me, Nelly! How came this chap with the intellectual countenance to be let off so cheap in Italy, between two such pretty widows as yourself and Lady Burlington?"

"Lady Burlington has little temptation to marry again. *She* has two children to occupy her thoughts and affections. Even were she so inclined, Henry Hamlyn, who is eight years younger than herself, besides being a Protestant and son to a man she abhors, is the last person likely to make her a suitable husband. With respect to myself—" she paused.

"Well, my dear! With respect to yourself?"

"I would rather not answer you; for it is not in my power to answer you sincerely," said she, with assumed firmness.

"Thank you, Nelly! Thank you, my child! That's just the straitfor'ard way in which I like to be treated by you! I'd rather you'd hit me a box of the ear, any day of the week, than palaver me with a syllable's worth of gammon. Well! I must see and judge for myself. We shall have the intellectual countenance here to-day, by dinner-time; and then, keep your secret, lady fair, if you can!"

Mrs. Hamilton replied by silently kissing his hand.

"I shan't see him to-night, however," said the colonel, laughing; "so don't try and coax me to be a good boy, before I've an opportunity of being a bad one. To-day's the grand let-off at the chairman's of the East India Company; and as the dinner is given expressly to *me*, I suppose I must go through the evening and my rubber with the big wigs asked to meet me; twenty at dinner, most likely, and only a quarter of a liver among the whole party! By-the-way, Nelly (I may as well tell you, for ten to one those chattering newspapers will, if I don't), that my poor old rajah has sent over funds to the company to buy me a service of plate as a token of gratitude and affection; and so, my dear, some day or other, when I'm in a better place, and you and your good man, whoever he may be, settled in the house in Portland Place, you'll have a few spoons and sauceboats to help you set up housekeeping."

Great was the disappointment to the colonel to find, the following morning from Ellen (who had purposely absented herself from Cavendish Square since the expectation of Henry's arrival), that a note from Lydia had already apprized her of his non-appearance.

But in return for this unsatisfactory intelligence, the colonel had strange news to communicate.

"I didn't expect a pleasant dinner yesterday!" said he. "Those kind of five-course affairs are seldom agreeable. But, by George! old Launchington's was worse than I'd bargained for. I suppose the dinners in Cavendish Square have rather spoiled one for such matters."

"Is Mr. Launchington's table, then, so bad a one?" demanded Ellen, in the simplicity of her heart.

"Oh! 'twasn't that, my dear! Even at a state dinner, one is always sure of a boiled chicken or slice of roast meat, to prevent one's quarrelling with one's fare. The dinners in this house are no great things; with their eternal fried whitings and tepid lamb-cutlets—but you never hear me complain. No! no! what I disliked so much yesterday was the company."

"I should have thought that, in such a house, you would be sure of meeting old colleagues?"

"I did, my dear! to the tune of a round dozen, which I was all the more sorry for, seeing that one don't like to expose one's self before old acquaintances!"

Mrs. Hamilton was surprised. She could imagine but one way in which a gentleman ever exposes himself at a dinner-party; yet had never seen her father-in-law in the slightest degree influenced by wine.

"You see, they weren't exactly *all* old Indians!" resumed the colonel. "Besides our own comfortable dozen, there were a few city grandees, and a monkey-man or two invited to put round the jokes, as in the old jovial days a good fellow used to be asked to help in putting round the wine. As ill-luck would have it, one o' these prating parrots was seated opposite to me; and took occasion to address so many of his jokes to me, and to ask so many idle questions, as a pretence for lugging 'em in, that I suppose I looked surly, or took him up short; for, by way of excuse for having tried to scrape acquaintance, he alluded to having dined with me at Hamlyn's. And so he *had*, as I admitted (when he brought it to my mind by some allusion to Lord Crawley); that time I ran up with Sir Robert Maitland, and left *you* at Ormeau."

"I remember you dined there with a large party," observed Ellen, who was pouring out the tea.

"Well, my dear! no sooner had this ill-favoured, officious little monkey coupled the names of Hamlyn and Lord Crawley, than a pompous, pursy old fellow (a Sir Benjamin something or other, who was sitting near us), flared up into such an attack upon Hamlyn, that I was forced to take up his cudgels and lay about me in a style that's always disgreeable when one's enjoying a sociable party. But my man wasn't inclined to knock under, even when he saw me in such a deuse of a passion; and didn't scruple to say that Hamlyn had sold his city colleagues to government; that the little man in black (Flimflam, I think they called him), would attest that the ambitious banker was going to be created Lord Scrip; and that in return for this empty distinction, he had withdrawn his parliamentary support from a question in which he was pledged, heart, soul, and honour, to advocate the interests of the great moneyed community in which he lives, and moves, and has his being! 'Let Richard Hamlyn only show his face in the city after the perpetration of the apostacy he is said to meditate,' said this stuffy old Sir Benjamin (a Falstaff without his wit!), 'and he may chance to have things thrown in his teeth he will find it difficult to digest!'"

"But *is* Mr. Hamlyn about to be created Lord Scrip?" inquired Mrs. Hamilton, in some surprise.

"If so, he is a greater ass than I take him for!" retorted the colonel. "Hamlyn's a valuable man in a plain way; but what the deuse should a fellow who has spent his life behind his counter in Lombard-street, have to do in the House of Peers? A banker lord would be a joke for a pantomime, or the comic annual."

"But when you said all this to your portly Sir Benjamin?"

"It didn't give me the means of contradicting his assertion that Hamlyn has pledged himself to government to support the Foreign Securities Bill; which, if he have, all Sir Benjamin said about him wouldn't be a quarter bad enough, for he would have to speak and vote again' his conscience, and the interests he had given his word to maintain to the last breath in his body!"

"Unless I am much mistaken, *no* pledge and *no* promise of that description would be sacred in Mr. Hamlyn's eyes, if a coronet were dancing before them in an opposite direction!" observed Ellen. "In defending his cause, therefore, dearest sir, I trust you were not tempted to commit yourself by denial?"

"*Commit* myself? to be *sure* I was tempted!" interrupted Colonel Hamilton. "I told Sir Benjamin Backbite, as loud as I could say it, I'd pawn my life Hamlyn had never entertained for a single moment such dishonourable intentions; and called on the little chatterbox to second my defence of the man whose bread and salt, by his own account, he had broken."

"And *did* Mr. Flimflam advocate his cause?"

"So far from it, my dear Nelly, that he admitted his belief of every syllable of the rumour; nay, he was base enough to confirm the notion (which I saw was pretty general throughout the party) by declaring that, at the dinner at which we had both met Lord Crawley, in Cavendish Square, the Home Secretary and Hamlyn were closeted cheek by jowl in the boudoir for more than half an hour in closest confab; which ended with the minister's saying to the banker, in *his* hearing, 'We reckon upon your *voice* as well as your vote, my dear Hamlyn; and what you so anxiously solicit shall be done without delay.'"

"A safe and pleasant guest to receive into one's house!" observed Mrs. Hamilton, with an air of disgust.

"Ay, but he'd better have kept his tongue from wagging, for I gave him a piece of *mine*, which was not quite so satiny as he could wish! But, by George! *his* is the sort of pendulum that nothing *will* keep at a stand-still!"

"It seems, then, that others are beginning to entertain, concerning Mr. Hamlyn, an opinion similar to my own?" observed Ellen, with a smile.

"The worst of it is, I'm afraid there's some truth in the report. I didn't heed the blustering of old Sir Toby Belch, nor the slaver of the backbiting punster. But after dinner, when Launchington took occasion to say something civil to me in private about his regret that anything unpleasant should have occurred to me at *his* table, he added, he'd rather I should have heard the ill-news elsewhere, which couldn't long fail of reaching my ears. 'I'm afraid, my dear colonel,' says he, 'Hamlyn's a lost man among us! In the great world, political intrigues are common. We hear of this duke or that lord turning his coat for a riband, or a place at court. But among commercial men, a man's word must be as good as his bond. Unless the columns that support the great fabric of mercantile strength in this country are upright and steadfast, there's an end of the credit of Old England.'"

"Mr. Hamlyn had pledged himself, then, to his city colleagues, to support their interests on this question?"

"Pledged himself? Why, he held the stakes, as it were, for the rest. Never was there anything like their confidence in him! The business comes on to-morrow. I wouldn't be in the gallery of the house for a trifle."

"But, surely, with the friendly feelings you entertain towards Mr. Hamlyn," observed Ellen, in spite of her antipathy to the banker, jealous of the honour of the family name of him she loved, "*surely* you may be yet in time to alter his determination? See him, dear sir, persuade him—"

"I'm afraid such arguments as mine, my dear, would have little avail against the determination of a hard-headed man like Hamlyn!" replied the colonel. "No doubt he's made up his mind on premises *he* considers good."

"But you may show him better."

"*Me*, my dear? not I, Nelly! I haven't the gift of the gab, and am but a batter-brains at the best."

"If you were at least to *try*?" pleaded Ellen, courageously. "Half the objects in this world are lost for want of a struggle. We are too fond of concluding evil to be inevitable. For my part, I have the worst opinion of Mr. Hamlyn. I believe him to be base, calculating, heartless. I believe he would sacrifice wife, child, friend, to his sordid speculations. I believe he would cause his children to pass through fire to Moloch, and see the existence of his sons blighted forever, to secure the stability of his house of business. But there are arguments for all natures and capacities! This man, whose

ears are shut to the cry of nature, is open to the influence of every breath of worldly opinion. Tell him how he is thought of; tell him how he is spoken of; tell him that the very honours for which he is bartering his good name will be spat upon and despised by the very fools he is intent upon dazzling; that he will be received into the high order he is ambitious of attaining with contempt and mistrust; and thus, believe me, dear sir—(*believe me!*)—you will obtain an ascendency over his mind. But what makes you smile?" said she, perceiving a sudden mistiness in the old man's eyes, and a singular expression pervading his countenance.

"I was thinking that I never saw any one look more like a queen than you do at this moment!" ejaculated the colonel. "Ah, Nelly! Bob knew better than his father when he proposed to give me such a daughter. Why, *why* did I hurry him into the grave, with such a wife, and such happy destinies awaiting him in this world!"

"You did *not*, sir," replied Mrs. Hamilton, in a more subdued voice. "It was the work of that man whom you mistakenly call a friend. It was the doing of Hamlyn."

Colonel Hamilton shrugged his shoulders. "I'm always loath to believe the worst of my fellow-creatures," said he. "I think now, as I thought the moment my poor son's letter and your noble remonstrances arrived at Ghazerapore, that Hamlyn acted for the best and judged for the worst. But if he complete the business attributed to him yesterday by those two fellows, Launchington's fat and lean kine, he'll be acting for the worst, and no mistake! As to going and arguing with him, Nelly—by George! I shouldn't have the face to do it. 'Twould be like arguing with a fellow whose hand one found in one's pocket. The pickpocket I should be sure to knock down; and I'm a'most afraid I might be tempted to use some ugly word to Hamlyn, such as would ill become the lips of the father of those two poor boys, to whom he opened his house and heart when the deuse another soul they had to care for 'em, or give 'em a Christmas home!"

"Still," pleaded Mrs. Hamilton, "the truest act of friendship we can perform towards a man is to undertake towards him some painful office from which others recede."

She was interrupted by untimely visiters. Miss Creswell and her young charge, who were sometimes despatched, in the course of their morning's walk, with messages to Mrs. Hamilton, made their appearance; for the colonel, in his cordial love of young people, was beginning to transfer to Harriet the fondness and good offices he had exercised in favour of her sister; and the young girl, who, amid the hurry and occupation created in Cavendish Square by the approaching wedding, was somewhat overlooked at home, was never happier than when sent on an errand to the Hamiltons.

The note of which she was the bearer merely regarded an arrangement for accompanying Lydia that evening to the Marchioness of Dartford's, who had forwarded her invitation to Ellen through her daughter-in-law. But the *real* purport of Harriet's mission was soon apparent to Mrs. Hamilton, when her young friend suddenly exclaimed,

"Is it not provoking, dear Colonel Hamilton, that, after all, we are not to have Harry in town? Instead of coming to amuse himself among us, he is gone down to Dean, where he won't find a soul to speak to at this time of year."

"The deuse he is?" cried the colonel, stealing a furtive glance towards Ellen, who was wonderfully busy refolding Mrs. Hamlyn's note into the shape of a miniature dunce's cap.

"Think how dull he will be! Not a creature at Burlington to welcome him but old Carlo!—at home, only the bare walls. Even Dr. Markham, from Mrs. Markham's approaching confinement, disinclined to leave the parsonage! How much happier my brother would have been here in London!"

"You forget, my dear," interposed Miss Creswell, with professional wisdom, "that your brother has serious pursuits which fully occupy his time, and dispose him against frivolous diversions."

"That's the very thing, my dear good ma'am!" cried the colonel. "'Tis because he has been duncing himself into an atrophy over his serious pursuits that we want to get him among us, to be nursed and petted. Frivolous diversions are bark and steel to him! The bow's been bent too far, and if we don't relax the strings they may chance to crack; and *then* where are we, pray, with our serious pursuits? Well! I suppose this nonsense of his will cost me another journey to bring him to his senses! I don't know what I should ha' done with sons of my own to deal with, for even these boys of Hamlyn's make a penny-postman of the poor old man."

As soon as Harriet and the governess had departed, carrying with them Mrs. Hamilton's acceptance of the evening's engagement, Ellen succeeded in persuading the colonel to leave the young recluse for a few days to the reaction of his feelings. She was afraid of an interview between Henry and her father-in-law, unless in her presence. Aware of the rash nature of Colonel Hamilton's well-affectioned impulses, she was apprehensive he might commit her by cheering the sadness of the invalid at her expense, with insinuations of an attachment on her part, which, tacitly rejected as she had been, a sense of self-respect forbade her to confirm. Moreover, with the promptitude of a superior mind, she had already decided upon the course she intended to adopt, both as regarded Henry Hamlyn and the imputed turpitude of his father.

Within an hour after their breakfast conference, she had despatched Johnston to Euston Square, with a letter to be forwarded by the railway, which he was to take measures for getting immediately despatched by messenger from Rugby to Ovington—a letter conveying to Henry Hamlyn the tidings of his father's political derilection, and her own exhortations that he would instantly start for London, and use his influence against the consummation of a step so irretrievable.

For Ellen Hamilton was keenly alive to the consequences of such tergiversation. Though still firm in her determination never to become a banker's wife, she could not forbear cherishing such vague hopes and expectations as brighten the reveries of those whose affections are deeply engaged; and her own future prospects appeared too closely bound up in those of Henry Hamlyn, and those of Henry himself (independent of all selfish considerations) were too dear to her not to make her keenly sensitive to the possibility of dishonour to the family name.

Much as she despised Richard Hamlyn, she was aware of the high credit attached to his

house, the fair reputation attending himself. Even at Ormeau, even among the Cossingtons, by whom he was personally disliked, she had heard him spoken of with the respect due to integrity and worth. As a public man, she had hitherto felt compelled to consider him with the regard which, in private, painful experience instructed her to withhold.

Fervent, therefore, were her entreaties to Henry, if he valued the renown of his father and consideration of his family, to exert himself to the utmost.

"I am not afraid," wrote Mrs. Hamilton, "that you will attribute this suggestion to any weak desire to see you again. Situated as we have been, and are, such a meeting could only be fraught with pain and humiliation for both. *You*, I am sure, will appreciate my desire that the name I once fondly hoped would become my own should stand spotless and unblemished in the history of the country; for this recreancy of your father *will* form a portion of its history! When a man betrays the interests of his order for interests of his own, whether that order be chivalrous or simply a concentration of commercial energies, he becomes important through the greatness of his infamy. In this country, the aristocracy of wealth is beginning to be nicely balanced against that of descent; and a few generations may give it the ascendency. I am assured that the measure about to be lost through your father's apostacy will strike a fatal blow at our commercial credit in foreign countries; and wherever canvassed—to whatever remote spot the vibration of the injury may extend—*his* name, *his* name, which is *yours*, will be connected with all the calamities, all the execrations that ensue! Dearest Henry, prevent this! Exert your strong powers of reasoning to convince him that it is never too late to recede from a premeditated act of baseness. Reward his harsh dealing towards you by saving him from the consummation of an inexpiable error!"

This letter once on its way, she was happier. It appeared to *her* unaccountable, while passing a portion of the day with the Hamlyns, to see them so joyous and unsuspecting, with an evil impending over the family, of which herself and Colonel Hamilton alone seemed cognizant. In the drawing-room, in Cavendish Square, she found, as usual, Mrs. Hamlyn, Walter, Lydia, Lord Dartford, who, after a slight expression of regret at their disappointment about Henry, returned to the discussion of hammercloths, Alençon lace, orange flowers, special licenses, and the number of *fleurons* which produced the surest combination of lustre and lightness in the setting of a diamond coronet, which her arrival had interrupted. In the gayety of her youthful and innocent heart, Lydia was imbibing, from the joyous, high-spirited young fellow to whom she had pledged her affections, some portion of the worldly levity inseparable from his brilliant position; and if Mrs. Hamlyn occasionally directed towards the happy, thoughtless couple one of the saddened looks which those who have suffered much let fall upon the inexperienced novices in life for whom all that glitters is still gold, even her gravity at times gave way under the contagion of the joy and prosperity that seemed to irradiate her children.

Lydia looked so happy—so beautiful—so full of bright and kindly thoughts—as she sat with her hand enclasped in that of the noble bridegroom who had chosen her from the world, that the mother's heart overflowed with tenderness, and the sunken rocks of life were for a moment hidden by the tide.

As Mrs. Hamilton passed the dining-room to return to her carriage, humbly escorted by Captain Hamlyn, who adored as the future Lady Edward Sutton the beautiful woman he had disparaged as Bob Hamilton's widow, she caught sight through the open door of the richly-laid table, which Ramsay was preparing for a dinner-party, with all its luxury of damask, crystal, china, plate—its groaning sideboard, and glittering dumb-waiters.

"And these are the gewgaws," mused she, deaf to the tender nonsense Walter was whispering under his mustaches, "for which this man is sullying his conscience! These be thy gods, oh Israel! To think that hundreds and hundreds of men and women are induced to degrade themselves by debt, and harass their lives with remorse, in order that their ostentation may be graced by unmeaning gauds like these!"

That day she dined with her father-in-law, at Lord Cossington's. During the lifetime of his father, the income of the marquis was circumscribed, and the right-thinking couple had sufficient regard for their own dignity to live within it. Their quiet, comfortable house in Wilton Crescent was accordingly unembellished by the brilliant novelties and snowy elegance imparting distinction to the banker's establishment. A few pleasant friends at their board, a good plain dinner served upon it, and the cheerful conversation sure to ensue from such a combination, made the evening pass far more agreeably than was ever the case in Cavendish Square, where the mind of the host was always secretly intent upon the *spectacle* of his entertainment, and the mind of the hostess, upon the fluctuations in that of the host.

The only drawback upon Ellen's pleasure in the little social circle in Wilton Crescent, into which she was already welcomed as a friend, while the beautiful children of the marchioness climbed familiarly on her knees, was the certainty that her presence had driven Lord Edward from his brother's fireside, in the dread of compromising his happiness by still farther intimacy with her who had explicitly informed him her affections were engaged to another. She was almost sorry when the carriage arrived to convey her to Lady Dartford's for the remainder of the evening! The high spirits of the excited marquis, and the bustle of the house of feasting, suited less with her present depression than the sober conversational habits of the society of the Cossingtons.

The following day, at an early hour for the routine of morning visits, Henry Hamlyn was announced in the drawing-room in St. James's-street; and but that the Duchess of Elvaston, in pursuance of her oldfashioned habits, was already sitting with her, Ellen would have scarcely found it possible to refrain from an exclamation of horror at the change wrought by by the lapse of the last three months in the person of her lover. They had parted on the day of the meeting of Parliament, when Henry hurried up from Cambridge to meet her at the Tower Stairs, and conduct her to her hotel; parted, full of hope, and happiness, and health; and now, there was something in the haggard countenance of her guest, bringing so powerfully to mind the wasted looks of poor Robert Hamilton in his last illness, that Ellen was

forced to press her hands stringently upon her heart and pause for breath, ere she could resume with the duchess the conversation his arrival had interrupted. Nor was the coherency and composure of Henry improved by gathering from their conversation the name of the noble matron so maternal in her deportment towards his own Ellen; for, common report having apprized him of the passion of Lord Edward Sutton, he fancied he discerned a tone of motherly affection in her grace's address to Mrs. Hamilton.

Meanwhile, the colonel, to whom the arrival of the new visiter had been duly announced, bustled in with a thousand cordial welcomes for one with whom, notwithstanding his intimacy with the other branches of the family, circumstances had hitherto prevented his becoming acquainted; and, though he had seen Henry only a few minutes the preceding year, in the course of a morning visit in Cavendish Square, he received him more as a son than a stranger. It was impossible for a man of his jocose disposition not to steal one little look at Ellen, to see how she bore his unexpected arrival; and a sad disappointment it proved, when, instead of the conscious smiles and "blushes celestial rosy red" he had anticipated, he found a deathlike paleness pervade the countenance of his daughter-in-law, who, just then, resembled a statue of Niobe rather than a living woman.

In order to afford an opportunity for the young couple to recover themselves and exchange a few happy words of tenderness, Colonel Hamilton was suddenly seized with a violent fit of gallantry towards the Duchess of Elvaston; insisting upon showing her some volumes of Italian engravings brought over by Ellen, which he had only been able to extricate from the custom-house a few days before.

This had the desired effect. While the duchess accepted his proposal to examine them more at her ease on a large table near the window, Henry Hamlyn, in an abrupt and agitated manner, approached Mrs. Hamilton. A few whispered sentences served to convey a world of painful intelligence.

"Thank you heartily for your warning!" said he, without preamble. "I appreciate all that is noble and forgiving in your effort on the occasion. In vain! My interference has been wholly fruitless! I have seen him. I have remonstrated—pleaded—argued—with the utmost respect, but the utmost warmth; and all, *all* in vain! He is determined to lose himself! He whose independence of mind and uprightness of principle I venerated as those of a demi-god. I could have borne all but *this*, Ellen! The ruin of my earthly happiness was nothing to *this!* I have suffered much. My health is failing—my faculties are broken; and now—. But I am too selfish in vexing you with my afflictions!" said he, stopping short, when he beheld tears stealing down the marble cheeks of Mrs. Hamilton. "I would not leave London, dearest Ellen, without thanking and blessing you!"

"Going so soon?" faltered Mrs. Hamilton, unprepared for this announcement.

"What would you have me do? I cannot trust myself, dearest, to stay here! I have not courage to hear my father's name become the fable of the clubs—the scorn of his old friends—the jest of the newspapers! As I came hither, just now, I met—But no matter! It is not for *you* to take part in my humiliations! Farewell!"

It was impossible for Mrs. Hamilton to withhold her hand; nor, indeed, had she voice or self-possession at that moment to hazard an attempt at detaining him. Colonel Hamilton and the duchess, however, who were turning over the rustling leaves of Piranesi, for life and death, saw nothing that was going on; and when, roused to attention by the ringing of the bell, touched by Mrs. Hamilton for the door to be opened, the colonel turned suddenly round to shake the parting hand extended towards him by Henry, he was deterred from the smallest tendency to his habitual explosions of jocularity, by the expression of anguish only too cruelly delineated in the hollow countenance of his young visiter.

"Where are you going, Harry?" said he. "Have you a horse here, or a cab?"

"I am going to Knightsbridge—I am going to see my brother!" was the faltered reply; and Colonel Hamilton saw that the poor fellow had so much difficulty in giving utterance to even these hurried words, that, with the view of concealing his emotion from the spectacled duchess, he resumed his task of turning over the leaves as fussily as though the world contained no object of greater interest to him than the ruins of the Capitol or the *contadine* of the Campagna.

"A younger son, I presume, of Mr. Hamlyn of Dean Park?" said the duchess, after his exit. "Those young people bear a very high character. The young Marchioness of Dartford, that is to be, is very much thought of by all the members of her new family; and my son Richard, who is in the Life Guards, tells me the eldest son is one of the smartest officers in the Blues. *This* seems a very gentlemanly young man, resembling his mother a little, whom I remember a most pleasing, pretty woman. In his father's business, I conclude?"

"At present, only one of the first scholars in the kingdom, and like to be the senior wrangler of his year," replied the colonel, proudly. "But, some day or other, he will be in the bank and in Parliament; and then, I venture to predict to your grace that we shall hear news of him!"

Sir Henry Middlebury himself would scarcely have proved a more advantageous interlocutor at that moment than did the good old humdrum duchess; who, at the word Parliament—(so important a watchword in the ears of all the Suttons!)—found as many questions to ask as would have filled three pages of Pinnock or Mangnall, concerning the prospects of the callow senator—his principles, his views, his education, his private tutor, his public, nay, even his preparatory school.

While poor Ellen was gradually recovering her self-possession sufficiently for the parting compliments about to be required of her, Colonel Hamilton persevered in his negatives and affirmatives; varied only by an occasional "I rather think so," or, "We shall see!" and a glance over his shoulder towards the fireplace; where Ellen, with her face turned towards the looking-glass, was smoothing her raven bandeaux, as a pretext for wiping from her eyes and cheeks the tears which not even *her* energetic fortitude was at that moment able to repress!

CHAPTER XXII.

"I would *share* his joys;
But make his griefs my own—all, all my own!"
SOUTHEY.

DEEPLY afflicted by the altered appearance of

poor Henry, and sympathizing heart and soul in his present anxiety, Mrs. Hamilton felt wholly unable to resume her daily routine of occupations. The colonel, had luckily, an appointment at the barracks in the Regent's Park with Lord Richard Sutton; who, at dinner at the Cossingtons, the preceding day, had insisted upon introducing the old soldier to the riding-school, to his chargers and Irish bloodhounds; and she was, consequently, at leisure to hasten to Cavendish Square, and offer all the comfort in her power to the poor mother, whose anxiety, she conceived, must equal her own.

But, to her surprise and vexation, Mrs. Hamlyn was absent. The approaching marriage of her daughter afforded her a thousand trivial but peremptory occupations; and Ellen contrived to discover, by cross-questioning Harriet and Miss Creswell, that Henry had not seen his mother since his return from the city; that they knew nothing of his movements; and that the whole party were going in the evening to a concert at the house of Lady Vernon.

Nothing could have afforded stronger evidence of the utter ignorance of Mrs. Hamlyn as to the peculiar position of her husband! She was a woman who at all times occupied herself little with the interests of public life; and the slightness of sympathy between herself and her husband prevented those natural confidences which must have rendered the crisis as trying to *her* as to himself. It was too ordinary a circumstance with her to see his brow overclouded, when leaving his home for business in the morning, to create any uneasiness in her mind; and the interview of remonstrance between him and his son, in Lombard-street, was as yet unknown to her.

Nor was she likely to be enlightened concerning the impending mischief by the rumours of society. The apostacy of Hamlyn from the cause of his city colleagues was, of course, unsuspected; except in a limited circle of Parliamentary men, among whom it had been bruited by the connivance of ministers, expressly in the hope of shaking the opposition of others, who, in questions of commercial interest, were apt to be influenced by the opinions of the member for Barsthorpe. By these means, had the report reached the ears of Sir Benjamin Bondwell; and, through him, struck consternation to the heart of Colonel Hamilton. But the majority of the house, aware that the question was to be brought before them that night, fully expected to see Richard Hamlyn get up as before; to support with his usual vigour of oratory and extent of information the line of policy he had so long and conscientiously upheld.

That the discovery of his sudden secession, in connexion with the report of his approaching ennoblement, would array against him a whole host of exulting enemies, Mrs. Hamilton could not doubt; and sincerely did she regret to find that Lydia and her mother were likely to be startled by intelligence of such a nature, under the roof of persons whom she knew to be their foes. It was more than probable, if the division took place at an early hour, that many members would arrive in Grosvenor Place, open-mouthed from the house, with tidings of the singular self-sacrifice of Hamlyn the banker!

Address a letter to Mrs. Hamlyn on the subject, she dared not. It is so difficult to allude, in words of a nature to meet the eye of a wife, to any dereliction from honour on the part of a husband! Moreover, there was so great a probability that any letter brought by one of Colonel Hamilton's servants to Grosvenor Square might fall into the hands of the banker, that it seemed impossible to hazard a hint upon the subject nearest her heart.

"After all, *women* are not made responsible for the political delinquencies of their husbands!" said she; "and the society of the Vernons is composed of people too well bred to afford the slightest indication to dear Mrs. Hamlyn of the contempt likely to be provoked by the paltering of this despicable man."

She had herself agreed to accompany Lady Cossington that night to the Duchess of Elvaston's private box at Covent Garden; and in the fear of provoking the remarks of the colonel, if she excused herself, judged it better to enjoy her abstraction *there*, in pretended attention to the play, than remain at home, cultivating her own uneasiness, and exciting that of her father-in-law.

Poor Ellen had, however, for once, nothing to fear from the colonel's jocularity. So deeply was he affected by a circumstance tending to discredit the man in whom he had placed such implicit confidence, and afflict the family he loved best in the world, that, so far from indulging in his usual pleasantries, or enjoying, as was his wont, a good play seen from a good box, he remained as still and silent as Ellen herself, till the entrance of Lord Cossington towards the end of the afterpiece.

"I thought there was a division to-night?" said his wife, whom he had forewarned not to expect him.

"There is! But, to my great surprise, I am not wanted, and have paired off. We have it hollow to-night! Thanks to an admirable speech from Hamlyn, the banker, ministers will carry it triumphantly."

And forthwith they began discussing the performance. For there was nothing to surprise Lady Cossington in her husband's announcement. She knew that Hamlyn was of their party, on many occasions an able supporter of government; and it was only natural that he should make an able speech in favour of a ministerial measure. Colonel Hamilton knew better than to provoke explanations by a single inquiry; and Ellen was, consequently, secure from the cutting remarks she had so much apprehended. She was among people for whom the moneyed interests of the country constituted no especial interest, and for whom a ministerial triumph was all in all. She only trusted that Lydia and her mother might be safe among those equally circumscribed in their sympathies.

Next morning, the Hamiltons woke with that vague sense of disquietude and trouble which arises from the backslidings of a friend. Neither of them chose to refer, as they sat at breakfast, to the subject which occupied the thoughts of both; and as the newspaper lying on the table was the leading ministerial journal, it adverted to the debate of the night before, as chiefly remarkable for the powerfully-argumentative speech of the honourable member for Barsthorpe; complimenting the ministry and the country on his recently-enlightened views, and remarking that it was not possible for a man of such strong understanding and consistent principles to remain permanently opposed to a measure tending to the tranquillization of the public mind, and securing a vested right of the most sacred nature and importance.

It was useless, therefore, to refer to such an organ for any indication of the state of public opinion towards Hamlyn; and Ellen respected the feelings of her companion too much to propose sending for an opposition paper to ascertain how the matter was regarded in more liberal quarters.

"I don't much like going to Cavendish Square to-day!" said the colonel, as they rose from the breakfast-table. "Did I understand you right, my dear Nelly, that Harry was going out of town again? Doesn't he mean to dine with me? doesn't he mean to—"

"I know no more than yourself!" replied Mrs. Hamilton, in a faint voice. "He appeared yesterday to be in a state bordering on distraction. All that *we* regret in his father's proceedings, is to *him* a source of far bitterer mortification."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" interrupted the colonel, in his turn. "A noble heart, I take it; a high-toned mind; too good by half for a banker. Nelly! we *must* do or say something to comfort him. Sit down and write him a bit of a note. Persuade him to dine with us to-day."

"Any demonstration of kindness on *my* part, dearest sir, would only aggravate the evil!" replied Mrs. Hamilton, deeply touched by the affectionate tone of the old man. "Better leave him to himself! Nevertheless, I own I am most anxious for news of his movements. If, therefore, you dislike going to Cavendish Square (where, however, at this time of day you would be secure from meeting Mr. Hamlyn), could you not call upon his son at Knightsbridge; or upon Lord Dartford, or—"

"Can I speak with you a minute, sir?" interrupted the voice of Johnston, who, just then, half opened the door.

"Come in, come in! No one here but Mrs. Hamilton. Come in, Johnston!" cried the colonel, almost angry at a hesitation which he attributed to punctilio established as a matter of etiquette by the waiters of the hotel. Still, however, the man hung back, even after his master had pettishly inquired what the deuse he was afraid of.

"I wished, colonel, to have a moment's conversation with you!" said he, forced at length to enter the room; and Mrs. Hamilton was astonished to perceive that the face of the gray-headed servant was blanched almost to the ghastliness exhibited by that of Henry Hamlyn the day before. In a moment, it occurred to her agonized heart that some mischance had befallen the object of her affections!

"Johnston!" said she, assuming a tone of firmness sorely belied by the tremour pervading her whole frame; "*pray* speak out! Do not be afraid of alarming *me*. I see how it is! You have bad news to communicate from Cavendish Square!"

"I have, indeed, ma'am," said he, almost sobbing. "Sad news, sad news! though I'm sure I don't know how the report should have reached you already! For the man who brought the account ran all the way, and is now breathless in the hall."

"What the deuse are you all talking about?" cried the colonel, becoming alarmed, yet angry with them and himself for his own agitation. "*What* news? *What* man? What's happened? Speak out!"

"He is not dead, sir, as was at first apprehended!" replied Johnston, little suspecting the anguish which his inexplicitness was inflicting upon his young lady. "The surgeon who was with him in the coach had done no more than stanch the blood; so he could not by any means say the case was hopeless."

"Of whom *are* you talking?" persisted Colonel Hamilton, himself sickened by the agony of suspense; while Ellen fixed her eyes inquiringly on Johnston, totally incapable of pronouncing a syllable in elucidation of her fears.

"Of Mr. Hamlyn, sir! who has been desperately wounded in a duel. Mrs. Hamlyn, as soon as she could be made to understand what had happened, desired you might be instantly sent for."

"Why the deuse didn't you say so at first? Let the carriage come round, or stay—no! call a cab! I don't know what I'm thinking of, or saying. My hat, Johnston! Ellen! my poor child, I see by the joyful expression of your countenance for how dreadful a blow you had prepared youself! But 'tis bad enough as 'tis. Poor Hamlyn! the father of such a family! Coming with me? That's well! I should have scarcely found courage for the scene, Nelly, unless you were by my side."

The information gradually, slowly, and sadly acquired by Colonel Hamilton in explanation of this afflicting summons, may as well be succinctly related to the reader. The Morning Post, while communicating, in so good a spirit, to the public the conversion of Mr. Hamlyn to the financial tenets of government, had considerately forborne to notice the grievous interruptions, hootings, howlings, bellowings, crowings, experienced by the member for Barsthorpe, in the course of a speech, which, had it been the result of conviction and good faith, was citable as a splendid effort of oratory. From the moment of driving his "filthy bargain," or, rather, of being driven into it, Hamlyn had been intent on the concoction of this effort of sophistry. Confiding, and with reason, in his own powers of dissimulation, he trusted to give to his act of treachery an air of conviction, recantation, repentance, and atonement; and entertained little doubt that the energy of his eloquence would recruit to his banner a portion at least of the habitual opponents of government.

Great, therefore, was his disappointment when, for the first time in his political career, he experienced the greatest difficulty in making himself heard. He had, of course, taken precautions that the smallest syllable of his discourse (which might have been aptly named "Hamlyn's Apology") should reach the ears, or, rather, the pens of the reporters, to ensure having justice done him on the morrow by the ministerial organs. Still, it was deeply humiliating to one accustomed to be listened to on questions of magnitude in that house, amid a silence which enabled him to hear a pin drop, to be assailed with outcries of so indecent a description as now met his ears. It was, in fact, a *charivari*, accomplished by assailants of the highest class and credit.

Nevertheless, he bore the attack in a manner very different from what might have been predicted of the member for Barsthorpe, who, in earlier years, had been twice placed in the custody of the Serjeant of the House. The baited bull neither tore up the ground under his feet, nor turned upon the foes who were hounding him into madness. Either his habitual hypocrisy enabled him to control all show of emotion, or he was overwhelmed by consciousness of his

degrading predicament. His speech was correctly given, but it had evidently been learned by rote, and was recited as an oration of Demosthenes may have been, after his practice, in presence of the roaring surges. No warmth—none of that nervous energy which must unite with logical deductions to form the perfect orator. His voice was now as passionless as habitually his countenance. With many present, his argumentative and self-sacrificing speech did but borrow new force from this stern immobility, resembling that of an antique statue of some sage of the schools, rather than the irritable energumen of modern parliaments. But his enemies thought otherwise. His enemies decided that Samson was shorn of his strength—that Hamlyn's sun was set.

> Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
> And he retires!

was the exhortation of the honourable member for Alverstoke (one of the wits of the house) to the Whig member who was to reply to the new mouthpiece of government; and, either following this advice or his own devices, the sarcastic orator proceeded to attack the apostate with a discharge of puny but poisoned arrows, which left him prostrate, like Gulliver martyrized by Lilliputian darts.

A coarse apostrophe from Sir Benjamin Bondwell was still harder to be borne. The party spokesman had attacked a government measure, supported by the honourable member for Barsthorpe. The banker attacked his brother banker, openly, strongly, advisedly; describing the city as betrayed by one of its most favoured sons, and ending with "I am very grieved for thee, Jonathan, my brother."

All this was passively endured by Richard Hamlyn. Having screwed his courage to the sticking-place, he maintained his usual attitude in the house, conversing freely with one or two government men, to whom Lord Crawley had given their cue. Already the flattering unction of administrative thanks had been laid to his soul; for, whatever feelings his speech might have excited against himself, it had gained to the measure under his advocacy double the number of proselytes upon which they had reckoned; and a ministry cares about as much for the sufferings of its implements as a general for the life of the soldier he deputes to a forlorn hope!

At length, encouraged by his apparent tameness, the wit already referred to as stimulating the malice of others ventured to rise on his own account. After a humorous comparison of the honourable member for Barsthorpe to the thief who bit off his mother's ear at the foot of the gallows, he hazarded so pointed an allusion to the rumoured elevation of Mr. Hamlyn to the peerage, in reward for the sudden falling of the scales from his eyes at the prophetic touch of the first lord of the treasury, that a general cry of "Order!" and "Shame!" deadened the force of Hamlyn's spirited and eloquent refutation.

Fortunately for him, they had hit the *in*vulnerable heel, and he was, consequently, enabled to defend himself in a style of indignation which brought down the cheers of the house, always generously susceptible to an injustice, and served still farther the purposes of government by the popularization of the measure in the person of its advocate.

But the cheers of the house expire in the lobby! *There*, the member becomes the man again; and when, after a triumphant division, Richard Hamlyn hurried through the throng, he found himself contemplated by many with coldness, by some with undisguised contempt; while the stammered and awkward compliments of such of his parliamentary colleagues as had no personal interest in the question evinced more plainly than all the rest that what might be considered a triumph had better have been a failure!

His patience was now oozing from his spirit, drop by drop. As the excitement of a man under the influence of wine is stimulated by contact with the open air, in proportion as Hamlyn reapproached the common routine of life, and left behind him the factitious atmosphere of Parliament, where insult is *not* insult, or derision mockery, he became infuriated by the sense of his mortifications, as a man grows suddenly conscious of his bruises a certain time after a fall.

Just as he had been wounded to the quick by a civilly ceremonious bow from a man with whom he was accustomed to exchange familiar nods, Alberic Vernon passed him, laughing immoderately, arm and arm with the wicked wit by whom the question of the Scrip peerage had been so indiscreetly broached. That he was the subject of their merriment he could entertain no doubt; nor did he hesitate to damp the insolent mirth indulged at his expense, by instantly accosting them, and demanding from the honourable member for Alverstoke his authority for the report of his intended elevation to the peerage.

Alberic Vernon, to whom the officious squire of Dean Park had been rendered an object of contempt by the insolence of his parents, but who now loathed him as the father of the man reported to be betrothed to the beautiful woman by whom he had been ignominiously rejected, was far from regretting this occasion for a public retort.

"He heard it from *me*, sir!" said he, fiercely. "The fact was stated at my father's table by one of your intimate friends, whose name you will excuse me from mentioning, as I am happy to say that it is not the custom of *the Vernon family* to betray their associates."

Hamlyn was furious. The two insolent boys before him were inflamed with all the valour of Bellamy's hottest tumblers, while *he* was influenced by the still stronger stimulus of cold and deadly enmity against his kind—the friends who had abandoned him, the foes who had clamoured over his fall; and when the companion of Alberic Vernon, vexed at finding his weapon of offence snatched from his hand, persisted in his raillery, such words were in a moment exchanged between them as rendered explanations of a more deadly kind imminently indispensable.

It was past midnight. The dispute had occurred in so public a place, that there could be little doubt of such interference between the parties as uniformly protects and justifies the blustering of modern senators (who, like heralds of old, and Macbeth in modern times, bear a charmed life!), unless a hostile meeting could be arranged before the quarrel got wind.

"We must forestall the newspapers!" was the first remark of Alberic Vernon, as the "friend" of the honourable member for Alverstoke; and the individual whom Hamlyn had sought in haste in the coffee-room, as at once an obsequious ally of government, and too heavily indebted to his firm to refuse assistance, instantly repair-

ed with Vernon to the Travellers, to arrange the preliminaries for a meeting the following morning, at eight o'clock, in Battersea Fields.

When Hamlyn reached home, the excitement produced by this disastrous succession of events was still whirring in his brain and gnawing his heart's core. Fortunately, the family was at rest. Mrs. Hamlyn had appeared at Lady Vernon's concert only in obedience to his orders; and, having been harassed by the pertinacious interrogations of Sir Henry Middlebury (who, knowing few people in the room, had attached himself to her side, not only to offer his congratulations and inquire the names of all the performers, and the various schools of art in which they had received their musical education, but the counties in which the Marquis of Dartford's estates were situated and the connexions of his family), had hastened to her pillow; and Hamlyn, dismissing the footman who usually sat up for him, with express instructions that Ramsay should bring him his shaving-water at a quarter to seven in the morning, was left the only person waking in the house—alone, with the tremendous consciousness that it was, perhaps, the last night he might ever pass under its roof! Not that *his* soul was easily depressed by desponding presentiments; and his irritation not having yet subsided, the preponderating feeling in his heart was to pursue, retaliate, exterminate!

The banker had forgotten that He who assumes to himself the privilege of Vengeance might exterminate in his turn! Moreover, the leading characteristic of Hamlyn's mind was at all times its sanguine self-reliance. Like most people who put not their trust in Providence—like most people reliant on the intervention of Chance—it cost him little more to expect miracles from its operation, than trifles. Half of the errors of his life arose from this rash confidence. All he had misappropriated of the property of his clients, he *firmly expected* to replace. He was fully persuaded that some happy combination of luck would enable him to repair the disorder he had created. And now, with a duel on his hands—a duel with a young and adroit antagonist—a duel in which public feeling, if not the cause of justice, would be wholly on the adverse side—he confidently expected to despatch his business in Battersea Fields as coolly, methodically, and triumphantly, as his business on the Stock Exchange!

His utmost efforts, therefore, towards "setting his house in order" consisted in addressing a few lines to Spilsby, with instructions on certain points of business to be despatched on the morrow, in case he was unable to reach Lombard-street at an early hour; which he determined to forward into the city by the same conveyance that took him to the residence of his second, the Honourable Colonel Frampton, who had promised to drive him to the ground.

He next committed to the flames a few papers from his bureau, which were not calculated for the scrutiny of his family in case he should meet with mischance, and have to resign his keys to the keeping of his wife. The bloodless nature of most duels arising out of parliamentary squabbles seemed to ensure him against anything *beyond* this. On recalling to mind the various hostile meetings which had occurred for the last twenty years, under similar provocation, he could not remember *one* in which the interference of seconds had not been of the most exemplary nature.

Nevertheless, as his excitement subsided, and his thirst for vengeance grew slack under the influence of anxiety touching the unfavourable impression the administration of a severe lesson to his antagonist might produce on his reputation as a man of business, his spirits became somewhat depressed. Ere he retired to the small bedroom which, for some years past, he had occupied, on the plea of the disturbance his early hours created to Mrs. Hamlyn, he entered the drawing-room, now cold, silent, deserted, and imperfectly lighted by the single wax-taper he carried in his hand. The air was fragrant with the fine exotics adorning the flower-stands; and the light, dim as it was, of the taper he held, fell upon a thousand gorgeous objects—magnificent vases, marble tables, entablatures of malachite and coral, and all the splendid luxury of *pietra dura* and *marqueterie*.

He seemed to notice, for the first time, the downy softness of the rich Aubusson carpet under his feet; the glitter of the splendid lustres over his head. Like the Cardinal de Richelieu, when discovered by his secretary early one morning a few weeks previous to his decease, taking a solitary leave of the beloved pictures and exquisite statues of his gallery, the eyes of the banker lingered tenderly upon the gaudy objects, for the enjoyment and display of which he had perilled the credit of an honest name, and the peace and welfare of hundreds of confiding victims.

At length, just as he was on the point of receding with noiseless steps from the room over which slept his gentle wife and the happy daughter whose dreams were at that moment roseate with the brightest hues of youthful love, the light he held fell upon the gaudy frame of a large picture, to which, for some years past, his eyes had never once been directed; and, for some minutes, they were now riveted upon it, as by a master-spell.

It was a portrait—a full-length portrait from the pencil of Lawrence, representing Mrs. Hamlyn—no! not Mrs. Hamlyn—*Sophia*, at the climax of her youthful loveliness, a year after her marriage, with her first-born resting on her knee. The picture had been begun at his father's suggestion, while the young bride was yet an idol at Dean Park; the child being added during the slow completion of the portrait, as an afterthought of his own. In himself, one of the loveliest infants ever seen, little Walter derived new beauties from the graceful pencil of the artist; and well did Hamlyn remember how fondly he had assisted in keeping the child quiet during the tedious task of sitting, by holding before his little laughing eyes the very toy which, in the picture before him, figured in the hand of the smiling, exulting mother. The force of association brought back with lifelike force to the banker's mind the soft, warm grasp of those dimpled baby hands. Yet, at that moment, his own were cold as death, and hard with the clinch of suppressed emotion!

From the soft and sinuous outline of the half-naked babe, the eyes of Hamlyn wandered to the face of the mother. But could those clustering curls—those sparkling eyes—those blooming cheeks, ever have been the features of his wife? Where was that woman gone? What had become of her? She *could* not have lapsed into the pale, sad, silent, spiritless being who sat by his household board; she *could* not have progressed into the suffering mother who bore her

cross so meekly! For a moment, Sophia Harrington as he had first beheld her—joyous, brilliant, beautiful, beloved—recurred to his mind; and in reflecting on the transformation his conduct had effected, so heavy a sigh arose from the depths of his soul, that he had ample need to recur anew for consolation to the face of that beloved son, whose mature years fulfilled all the promise of their youthful grace. The passionate joy with which he had hailed the birth of his first-born seemed to have prolonged its influence even until now, with a rapture unsusceptible of decay.

"I should like to have shaken hands again with Walter!" was his closing reflection, as he quitted the room, and slowly ascended the stairs. "In these cases, one never knows what may happen. I should like to have shaken hands first with Walter."

Next morning, it excited no surprise among his servants that their ever-active master should be astir an hour earlier than usual. For a moment, indeed, it struck Ramsay as extraordinary that Mr. Hamlyn should say he did not choose to wait for his cabriolet (which he pretended to have forgotten to order over-night), but that, being in a hurry, he would walk to the nearest coach-stand. Nay, even had the butler surmised that his master was going out to fight a duel, so convinced was he of the propriety and decorum of every measure of Mr. Hamlyn, that he would have felt persuaded some new canon of the law had, unknown to himself, authorized and legalized such a breach of the peace.

Before noon, however, he was suddenly summoned to assist in removing the wounded man to his chamber; and the first to propose sending for Colonel Hamilton, as well as to the sons of his unfortunate master.

Such was the state of affairs when the veteran reached Cavendish Square. The surgeon who had accompanied Hamlyn home in the carriage from Battersea had never left his side, and Keate and Brodie were every moment expected. But neither Mrs. Hamlyn nor his daughter had been yet permitted to see him. From the bewildered looks of the former, Colonel Hamilton saw at once that *she*, at least, entertained no hope; and, having entreated Ellen to remain with her friend in the drawing-room, to which they were sentenced during the examination of the wound, he hurried with anxious but faltering steps to the chamber of the wounded man.

Carefully as he turned the handle of the bedroom door, Hamlyn, who was lying on the bed half undressed, his coat being off, and his shirt stained with blood, was roused by the sound; and, without unclosing his eyes, made the same inquiry which had already three times before escaped his lips, "Is that Walter?"

"Captain Hamlyn was out on a field-day, sir, when John reached the barracks," whispered Ramsay, who, with his usually rubicund face, as pale as death, was supporting his master.

While he was yet speaking, Colonel Hamilton approached the bedside, and gently pressed the hand extended beside the sufferer. Conscious that this tender touch was of a very different nature from the professional handling of the surgeon, Hamlyn slowly unclosed his eyes, and, on recognising the colonel, attempted a faint smile.

"This is sad boy's play for a man of my years," said he, in a feeble voice. "But it was none of my seeking."

Perceiving the surgeon shake his head reprovingly at this attempt to speak on the part of his patient, already exhausted by loss of blood, Colonel Hamilton placed his finger on his lips. Tears were coursing each other down his cheeks. He had seen hundreds—thousands—slain in battle. But it happened that this was the first time he had beheld a man of peace slain by the hand of a fellow-citizen. The instincts of his manly heart shrunk from the sight, as from that of assassination.

"Has Mr. Henry left town?" he inquired, in a low voice, of Ramsay, as Hamlyn again reclosed his eyes; and the butler's sign in the affirmative proved a sad disappointment. Convinced that Hamlyn was rapidly breathing his last, he thought it hard that neither of his sons should be present to receive his parting instructions, and dying breath.

"So died my poor boys!" was his involuntary reflection. "Neither kith nor kin at hand to close their eyes! But it is cruel indeed upon poor Hamlyn!"

At that moment, a carriage stopped at the door; and though the sound was scarcely noticed by the persons present, the wounded man again, and with still greater effort, renewed his inquiry of, "Is it my son Walter?"

"Since you are anxious, I will go as quick as possible to the barracks, and follow the directions I receive till I find him, and bring him back!" whispered the colonel, bending over him, and, on receiving a grateful word of assent, hastened to quit the room. On the stairs he encountered Keate and a stranger; and having hurriedly acquainted him of the state of the case, returned for a moment into the drawing-room, not, however, to comfort its anxiously-expecting inmates. The expression of his countenance sufficiently apprized them that *he*, at least, was without hope.

"Has any one sent for Harry?" said he to Lydia, perceiving that her mother was incapable of understanding or replying to the question; and, on being answered in the negative, Colonel Hamilton rapidly arranged with his daughter-in-law, that, while he proceeded to Knightsbridge, *she* should despatch Johnston to Dean Park, that the news of the fatal event might be communicated with due reserve to the member of the family least capable of supporting the shock. A few lines from Ellen were to entreat his instant return to town.

"Poor Hamlyn—poor Hamlyn!" murmured Colonel Hamilton, when (after learning at the barracks that, for want of authority, no message had yet been despatched to Wormholt Scrubbs after his master) he took possession of Walter's horse and cab, and authorized the groom to exercise to the utmost the speed of the finest stepper in London. "In the possession of all that renders life desirable! Rich, healthy, happy, active, useful! A quarrel at the House of Commons, they say. Ah! I feared no good would follow those cursed reports I heard t'other day at Launchington's. Maybe, however, they belied him! God grant it! 'Tis hard enough to lose a friend; harder still to lose one's respect for his memory. But how—*how* am I to break this afflicting news to Walter and Dartford?"

The task was, indeed, a trying one. He found them in the animated exercise of their professional duties—those two brilliant and promising young men, and at the first moment, almost inclined to be vexed at his unexpected intrusion

on the ground. Nevertheless, the sight of his fine horse in a foam, and Colonel Hamilton pale and speechless, soon convinced Walter that something was sorely amiss.

In a few seconds, he had taken the groom's place in the cabriolet, and was galloping his horse back to town at a still more frantic rate; while Lord Dartford, though for a moment relieved, even to joy, by learning that the family disaster regarded not the being dearest to him in the world, hastened to obtain from his commanding officer a remission for Walter and himself from their duties of the day, and was soon following them at a distance on his charger, at the utmost speed compatible with the field-day accoutrements.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I do but hide
Under these words, like embers, every spark
Of that which has consumed me. Quick and dark
The grave is yawning. As its roof shall cover
My limbs with dust and worms, under and over,
So let oblivion hide this grief."—SHELLEY.

By the mercy of Heaven, Walter Hamlyn arrived in Cavendish Square in time to comfort and support his father by his presence during the painful operation of the extraction of the ball, which had been deferred till after the arrival of the second surgeon. Dashing through the crowd assembled as usual at the door, in aggravation of family afflictions, he had scarcely a moment to disencumber himself of his uniform and throw on a dressing-gown, in time to hang over the bed and stifle in his bosom the groans of his father during the agonizing operation, in which it was feared his strength might fail.

But the spell had already taken effect. While preparing himself for the effort, Hamlyn's eyes had encountered the form of his son (Walter, the grandson of old Walter Hamlyn), and feeling he had yet something to live for, something to cherish him, even though exposed to worldly obloquy, he seemed to rally his courage; and the Battersea surgeon, whose finger was continually on his wrist, announced a sensible improvement in the state of the pulse. The simple words, "My dear, *dear* father!" whispered by the voice of Walter, had conveyed volumes of exhortation and worlds of hope.

By the time the patient was relieved from his agony, and his son from the almost equal torture of witnessing it, by the time the two eminent surgeons had taken leave, leaving the original attendant to watch over the results of the assistance they had rendered, the afternoon was far advanced. At present, it was impossible to surmise the extent of the shock the system of the sufferer might have sustained. But it was much that he was still alive. The evening would show, by the usual accession of fever, how far the constitution was affected. Meanwhile, perfect quiet, and, if possible, sleep, was to be prayed for. Opiates had been already administered—straw was laid down before the house—the knocker removed—the bell muffled, and a policeman stationed at the adjoining door to entreat the forbearance of inquirers. The answer given to their anxious interrogation was the bulletin of the surgeons that "Mr. Hamlyn's situation was precarious; but that he was going on as favourably as could be expected."

These wise precautions had not, however, prevented a rumour of his death from getting into circulation in the metropolis; and from thence, of course, reaching the provinces, so as to produce a precautionary meeting, on the morrow, of the worthy and independent electors of Barsthorpe. The evening papers, nay, even a second edition of one or two morning ones, contained a most detailed and elaborate account of the duel, representing (of course according to the politics of the divers journals) the banker as a victim, and his antagonist as an assassin; or the challenger as a rash and intemperate man, and the honourable member for Alverstoke as a reluctant self-defender. In both accounts, facts were distorted, descriptions overcharged, and words attributed to both parties which had neither escaped their lips, nor were likely to escape the lips of men in their situation of life; and to one of these penny-a-lineations, in addition to a picturesque description of the mill near which the "fatal meeting" had taken place, a paragraph, headed "LATEST PARTICULARS," announced that "within the last quarter of an hour Mr. Hamlyn had breathed his last;" probably as an excuse for lengthening the paragraph by an account of the maiden name of the amiable and accomplished lady he had left to lament his loss, and the number of children who were the fruit of their union.

While, therefore, Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughters were seated in breathless anxiety in the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, listening every time the slightest movement in the chamber overhead gave indication that the factitious slumbers of the wounded man were broken—while Lord Dartford, to satisfy the anxieties of Lydia, proceeded every quarter of an hour to the bedroom door to ascertain that all was proceeding favourably, and Walter still watching by the bedside—the clubs of the West End were deciding *who* was to fill the vacant seat for Barsthorpe; and whether the Honourable Member for Alverstoke and Alberic Vernon would have to surrender, in order to stand their trial, thus producing the loss of a couple of votes to the opposition. Such was the most interesting side of the fatal event to that idle, chattering class of London life, to whom the collision of heaven and earth were important only as affording matter for "news!"

At present, of course, public sympathy rested with Hamlyn. It was quite clear that, whoever might be the aggressor, the dead man was most to be pitied. All who had heard him speak the preceding night, felt privileged to be peculiarly horror-struck. Those who had seen the carriages of Keate and Brodie drive to the door in Cavendish Square, having an anecdote to relate connected with the event of the day, were, for a moment, objects of interest; while even common inquirers after the family who had actually seen the bulletin acquired temporary importance.

It was precisely the sort of incident to set the West End in a ferment, more especially at so unengaged a period of the season. The Hamlyns were, in every way, objects of interest. The approaching marriage of the beautiful daughter, the university distinctions of the gifted son, the popularity of the handsome Walter, were enhancements of the publicity usually connected with a banker and member of Parliament; and the peculiar circumstances connected, and still more peculiar ones *said* to be connected, with Hamlyn's recent conversion to orthodoxy in political economy, served only to add new vigour

to the countless tongues of Rumour already in motion.

By dinner-time, Flimflam, who had gone the round of the clubs to which he belonged, in order to gather "exclusive information," and "original anecdotes" connected with the duel, for the recreation of a party he was to join at the house of a high legal functionary, found his memory so overcharged with contradictory accounts, all related on "undeniable authority," that it almost required a mnemonic process to convey them so far as the Rolls House, in Chancery Lane. The only point on which the world was unanimous was one always insisted upon when duels prove fatal, namely, that the meeting *ought* to have been prevented, either by the seconds or the police. The quarrel had been public, the provocation generally recognised as sure to provoke a hostile explanation. Every man in London, consequently, decided that all present at the affray ought to be indicted for murder; though, had every man in London been implicated the following day in a similar affair, not one of them would have stirred his little finger in obstruction of a similar result. Nay, had the prudence of the parties suggested an accommodation, nine in ten would afterward have decided that they *ought* to have met; and tried to pick a hole in their character for courage, on the strength of their forbearance.

But while White's and Brookes's were lying and slandering in the levity of their hearts, while eating their oyster *pâtés* and waiting for their cutlets, far deeper mischief was produced in a quarter of the town where reports have a market value, and a fortune is sometimes realized by a dexterous fabrication.

Though the non-appearance of Mr. Hamlyn at the banking-house, at his usual time, had produced no anxiety—thanks to the plausible explanation he had taken the precaution of forwarding to Spilsby—by the middle of the day, tidings reached the city that the body of Hamlyn the banker had been brought home to his house in Cavendish Square; some said by a policeman, others, by a surgeon who had vainly attempted to restore animation to the corpse. To this positive announcement succeeded a rumour, arising as rumours do—none can tell how—connecting the event with the fatal word SUICIDE! It was reported on Change that the unfortunate banker had perished by his own hand; and whereas, in the city, one only cause suggests itself to sicken a man of life—*viz.*, a scarcity of money—though it could not be added to the report (as is usual in such cases) that the policeman had found only a few halfpence in the waistcoat-pocket of the self-murderer—it was confidently stated that the rash act of the banker was produced by the hopeless derangement of his affairs!

It was, luckily, past three o'clock before this fatal tale got wind; for within a few minutes afterward, the doors in Lombard-street were besieged by a far denser crowd of claimants than those in Cavendish Square of obliging inquirers. The answer of the clerks to such as pressed for particulars of Mr. Hamlyn's death "was, that they had received a communication from him some hours before, in his own handwriting; and that the messenger they had despatched for information to the West End half an hour before was not yet returned." Their answer to those who pressed for the payment of their balance was prompt compliance; and it was fortunate that the remittance that very morning of the debt of Schreiber and Co. placed them out of any immediate anxiety from the absence of their principal during a run upon the house.

Before Spilsby had found time to become really alarmed, the usual hour for closing arrived, and the last thing done to appease the anxiety of those who were hurrying too late to the door was to exhibit a bulletin, stating that Mr. Hamlyn had been wounded in a duel arising out of differences the preceding night in the House of Commons, but was going on as favourably as possible.

But though this authorized contradiction of the report of his death had all the good effect anticipated by Spilsby, the devisor of the measure, it was impossible to say what sort of feeling, or even what sort of contingencies, might arise next morning previous to opening the bank. At all events, the head-clerk, to whom the private business of the house was so inadequately known, did not choose to take upon himself any farther responsibility; and he accordingly despatched an express to Mr. Bernard Hamlyn, who was at his seat in Suffolk, unluckily out of the line of railroad communication; and as soon as the correspondence of the house was closed for the evening, and, in the absence of the acting partner, the keys delivered to himself, he proceeded to Cavendish Square, to ascertain the exact state of Mr. Hamlyn, and take the instructions of his representatives.

But this was no easy matter. In the first instance, he was denied access to the house, orders to prevent all disturbance or noise having been strictly issued. But the John to whom he had applied for admittance to Mr. Hamlyn the preceding week having luckily recognised his person, prevented his dismissal by the police, and ensured his ingress. Once within the hall, all seemed secure! But to whom was he now to address himself? One of Mr. Hamlyn's sons was in the country—the other in close attendance on the dying man! Even Ramsay had not a moment quitted the sick room since the operation. With respect to the banker's wife and daughters, even if the footman could have been prevailed upon to disturb them, of what avail their interference?

By good luck, the footman with whom the clerk was in communication was not only gratefully attached to his master, but by frequent attendance on Mr. Hamlyn to the House, and gossiping with the servants of other men of business, had imbibed some notion of the consequence of a banker's calling. *He* perfectly understood his master's life to be of more consequence to the community than that of a Lord Edward Sutton; and, having allowed Spilsby to station himself in the dining-room, promised to acquaint him the moment an interview was possible with Captain Hamlyn or the Marquis of Dartford!

"Colonel Hamilton has only this moment left the house!" said John; "'tis a thousand pities but you had spoken with Colonel Hamilton!" an opinion in which Spilsby so strongly coincided, that when, half an hour afterward, the good old man hurried back again (having been home only to make inquiries concerning Johnston's departure or arrival, and give orders in behalf of Ellen, who would not, even for a moment, leave Mrs. Hamlyn), before he made his appearance in the drawing-room, an interview was claimed by the clerk.

"Keate saw poor Hamlyn an hour ago, and decides him to be going on as favourably as possible!" said Colonel Hamilton, concluding that the anxiety depicted on the face of the bald-headed clerk proceeded solely from the suffering and precarious condition of his employer.

"I am heartily glad to hear it, sir!" replied Spilsby. "Mr. Hamlyn has been a good friend to *me*, and has my best wishes for his recovery. But I am exceedingly anxious, in the interim, to receive instructions from the family. The responsibility of so considerable a business as Mr. Hamlyn's must not be left upon my hands. I scarcely occupy even a confidential situation in the firm, and am quite at a loss."

"Not more so, I take it, than either of his sons would be!" cried the colonel, shrugging his shoulders. "By George! poor Hamlyn was right! It was essential that one of those boys should be prepared to succeed him in his business. But who could foresee all that has happened?"

"The fatal event of this morning, sir," resumed Spilsby, "has occasioned a most unexpected run upon the house. In the interval before opening to-morrow, confidence *may* be in some degree restored by the discovery that the report of Mr. Hamlyn's suicide was a libel—and even of his death, premature. But it is impossible to guess! A run upon a banking-house, once begun, proceeds like the conflagration of a house, as if stimulated by every new attempt to arrest its progress. I own I tremble for the result!"

"Tremble for the result of *what?*" cried the colonel—fancying that, in the house of death, no interest could prevail over that of the danger of the sufferer. "Why can't you speak plain—and speak out?"

"I mean, sir," resumed Spilsby, scarcely knowing whether he dared consider the colonel in any other light than an important constituent, to be alarmed by the announcement, "I mean that, should the pressure continue, we are unprepared to meet it without advice or assistance from one of the partners."

"What! forced to suspend your payments?" exclaimed the astonished old man. "Gad! this must be looked to immediately! This is a disastrous consequence of poor Hamlyn's disablement which I own I had not thought of! I'm expecting young Hamlyn (my friend's second son—the one who's intended for the firm) in town every minute. I'll confer with *him*. If possible, I'll take an opportunity of asking a word of instruction, in the course of the night, from Hamlyn himself. At what o'clock do you open?"

"At nine, sir."

"Can you be here at seven?"

"Certainly. But if I could possibly receive your instructions to-night—"

"Come back, then, at twelve!" said Colonel Hamilton. "By that time I shall have seen Harry Hamlyn, and taken his opinion on the matter."

But when midnight and the baldheaded clerk arrived together, no progress had been made—no Henry Hamlyn been heard of! On reaching Rugby, Johnston had ascertained from Jacob Durdan, who was waiting for the up-train and had been at Dean Park in the morning for tidings of the family, that Mr. Henry was neither there, nor expected; and at the station, where Henry Hamlyn's person was well known, it was stated that he had not returned from his visit to town. To save time, therefore, instead of cutting across the country to Ovington, at the loss of several hours, Johnston returned straight to London, bringing back the unopened letter of Mrs. Hamilton.

This was sore news to the colonel—astounding news to the clerk!

"I'm so poor a hand at business," said the former to Spilsby, "that I scarcely know how to advise, without the risk of doing mischief. But since matters are serious as you say, I recommend you to call together the friends of the house. Hamlyn's solicitors, Wigwell and Slack—Mrs. Hamlyn's brothers, the two Harringtons (they're no great friends, I fancy, with her husband; but as her trustees, they're forced to look to their sister's interests)—besides any business friends, of whom you've more cognizance than *I* have, should meet at the banking-house by daybreak to-morrow. *I* will be there myself, as the friend of the boys; and, late as it is, those gentlemen should be apprized to-night. The matter is too momentous to be trifled with!"

"I will hurry down instantly, sir, to Wigwell," said the clerk, who had a cab in waiting. "He keeps early hours, and will be retired to rest. But, luckily, he lives at his house of business; and I can leave a note, apprizing him of your desire. I will also proceed to Mr. Andrew Harrington's, in Bedford Square, who is somewhere about the best adviser in London we could have in such a strait, besides being one of our largest capitalists. If you can oblige me with writing materials, Colonel Hamilton, I will provide myself *here* with a letter to Wigwell and Slack, in case I am unable to see one of the partners to-night."

This important business despatched, and with it the clerk whose communications had added such thorny anxieties to the previous calamity, Colonel Hamilton returned to Mrs. Hamlyn and the family, from whom he was careful to conceal the name of the visiter to whom he had been called away; and after entering kindly into the dismay produced by Harry's non-appearance, and the lamentations of the poor mother that the dreadful news must now reach him abruptly, wherever he might happen to be, the dispirited old man persuaded her to adjourn to her chamber, watched over by Ellen, and insisted that her daughters should retire to bed. As a pretext for driving them to repose, he stated his desire to take a few hours' rest on the drawing-room sofa; Walter Hamlyn having resolutely declined his offer of sharing his vigils beside the wounded man, who was passing a far better night than had been hoped or predicted.

By these arrangements, Colonel Hamilton was soon left alone in that selfsame gorgeous apartment, of which Hamlyn himself had been the sole occupant at that hour the preceding night. But in how different a frame of mind, and with what opposite intentions! The banker had been steeling his mind for a barbarous purpose and unchristian encounter—the old man was devising projects of mercy and peace! The banker had recoiled with horror from reminiscences of a life of impenitence and hardness of heart; the old man attempted to compose *his* fluttered spirits by reflections full of tenderness and love! The banker had attempted to nerve his courage for impending dangers by reliance on his usual good luck, and the false energy produced by that systematic deference to the opinion of the world which had often enabled him to work miracles for the redemption of his

character; the old man reclined *his* head humbly on his bosom, and recommended himself and those who were dear to him to the mercy and providence of GOD!

"In this very room," was the last reflection that soothed his aching heart, and smoothed his troubled eyelids to rest, "did my poor boys often spend a cheerful holiday! Here they used to think of their poor old father, and the home they were never to see again. And, with the aid of the Almighty, I will do a father's part by the children of the unfortunate man who is groaning in his bed yonder, on whom the LORD have pity!"

He slept!—a sleep how different from that of the feverish sufferer above! But he had not been more than three hours lost in slumber, when he was startled by a cold hand placed upon his own.

"What the deuse! have I overslept myself?" cried he, starting from the sofa, in the belief that Johnston, whom he had forewarned for the purpose, was come to call him. But though all was dark in the room, save where the cold dim light of a spring twilight struggled through the chinks of the window-shutters and muslin curtains (the draperies having been left undrawn in the confusion of the night before), he speedily saw that the person by whom his hand was so eagerly grasped was no servant; and a few wild words of explanation soon apprized him that the fatal papers having reached Cambridge at night with the rumour of his father's death, Harry Hamlyn, who had only reinstated himself at Trinity a few hours before, had instantly got into a postchaise and hurried to town.

"I was afraid I should be too late—oh, *how* afraid I should be too late!" faltered he, opening his whole heart to the man with whom he had not yet exchanged fifty words, but whom he interpreted by his acts into everything that was just, generous, and humane. "And what would have become of me, had I not arrived in time? It was more essential for *me* than for the rest to receive his last blessing—for I am the only one of his children who ever crossed him! Are you aware that he once cursed me? He, my poor father! And to think that he might have died without a word of forgiveness!"

Tears burst from the eyes of the distracted young man, as, with clasped hands and heaving bosom, he uttered those incoherent words. "But he is better!" continued he, struggling to recover himself. "He has passed a good night. He has enjoyed some hours' sleep. I have just left Walter. I have even knelt, unseen, by the bedside of my father, who must not be disturbed. But, before relieving my brother from his watch, that he also may take some rest, I could not help coming to thank you, sir, for being here—you and *her*! It is so like you both! GOD bless you—GOD bless you!"

All this time Colonel Hamilton was striving to compose his thoughts, and resume the chain of his over-night considerations. It seemed grievous to molest the harassed and delicate young man before him, weary with a night's travelling as well as distracted by a night's anguish, with mere words of business—to arrest the warm current of his filial feelings by dry obstacles of worldly solicitude. But it was indispensable. The interests of too many human beings were dependant on the event. In as few words, therefore, as possible, Colonel Hamilton explained to Henry the critical position of his father's affairs, and the vital necessity that palliative measures should be adopted without delay.

To his great surprise, very little emotion was produced by the terrible announcement. Either Harry was strangely ignorant of the magnitude of the transactions in which his father's house was engaged, or the blow by which he had been previously smittem had actually stunned him. *So* completely, indeed, did he appear bewildered, and so thoroughly absorbed by the idea of his father's danger, that Colonel Hamilton judged it his duty to touch upon two strings, which, in the first instance, he had with scrupulous delicacy avoided. He spoke of the future welfare of his mother and sisters as at stake—he spoke of the dishonour likely to fall upon the name of his father!

"Let us go, then!" exclaimed Harry. "There is not a moment to be lost! Let us hasten into the city." And after attempting in vain to reduce his disordered dress and haggard looks to an air of propriety, he kept hurrying Colonel Hamilton to his father's dressing-room, adjoining the study below, where breakfast was set out; and each drank a cup of tea standing, ere they proceeded into the city in a hackney-coach.

The streets were nearly empty. The shops, slowly unclosing their windows as they approached the more commercial quarter of the town, began to restore an air of life and decency to the streets, paraded an hour before only by the outcasts of the metropolis, and the police stationed there for their coercion; and by the time they reached Lombard-street, though the clock of St. Sepulchre's had not yet struck seven, the shop-boys of the city were busily engaged in making the pavements impassable with their irrigations.

On the hackney-coach drawing up, the door was partly unclosed to admit them by the old porter of the counting-house, who appeared to have been posted there in expectation; and as they passed onward into the private room where Spilsby now reigned supreme, the old man plucked young Hamlyn by the sleeve to inquire after his poor master. It would have been a comfort to Harry, had his own heart been less full, to perceive that this venerable servitor had tears in his eyes.

Though they were before their time, with the punctuality so highly lauded by the old soldier, the clerks, the Harringtons, the solicitors, and two strangers (one of whom was introduced to Colonel Hamilton as the stock-broker charged with the business of the house), were already assembled, with the books open on the table before them, and their lengthened countenances bearing ominous testimony to the unsatisfactory nature of the examination. Even the intelligence brought by the new-comers, that Mr. Hamlyn had passed a good night, and was going on as well as possible, did little towards unbending the brows of the gloomy synod.

No one seemed anxious to be the first to speak, seeing that every word uttered must be an accusation against the acting partner of the house, in his own absence, and in the presence of his son. But had any spectator, personally uninterested in the scene, been present, he could scarcely have failed to observe, that the deference habitually testified towards Hamlyn and Co., by Wigwell and Slack, was already transferred to Colonel Hamilton, the Dives of the party.

"I am extremely sorry to say, sir," observed Spilsby, after due salutation to Henry Hamlyn and his venerable companion, "that matters here wear a still more unpromising aspect than I represented to you last night. Various securities on which I had counted as of an available nature are unaccountably missing; and, though I have no doubt that Mr. Hamlyn, on his restoration to health, will be able to enlighten us as to his manner of disposing of them, at present we are wholly in the dark. From indications afforded me by Mr. Andrew Harrington and his brother, I have reason to fear that the run upon the house will continue unabated; and that the cruel report of Mr. Hamlyn's death by his own hand, having reached our country correspondents last night, the post will bring in heavy demands. Mr. Bernard Hamlyn has not yet arrived in town, and I have only twenty thousand pounds and a fraction to open with this morning."

At this announcement, the two solicitors looked at each other with an air of blank amazement; the two uncles upon Henry, with a gaze of mournful compassion; while the stockbroker and his companion elevated their eyebrows, and muttered something unintelligible to the heads of their canes.

"In which case, to open at all were an act of insanity!" observed Andrew Harrington, in a decided tone. "But it is impossible that such a business as this should be so utterly unprovided with resources!"

"Mr. Hamlyn managed the concern in his own way, sir, admitting no person wholly into his confidence," replied Spilsby. "Till Mr. Bernard Hamlyn shall arrive, I am prepared to say nothing."

"And if he don't arrive, then the house must stop payment?" demanded Colonel Hamilton, coming abruptly to the point.

A distressing silence afforded the only reply to this direct apostrophe.

"God bless my soul! Can *nothing* be done?" cried the colonel. "Surely poor Hamlyn, who has so many friends, and acted so liberally to all the world, is not to be molested and disgraced on his deathbed, for want of a moneyed man or two willing to come forward in his behalf? *You*, sir!" continued he, turning towards Andrew Harrington, "you, sir, who are so near a connexion of the family, surely you will do the part of a kinsman by this unfortunate man?"

"I will do the part of a brother by his unfortunate wife, and her children shall be to me as my own," was the stern reply of the uncompromising London merchant. "But if the risk of half a crown of mine would keep Richard Hamlyn out of the Gazette, I do not scruple to say that I would not put it down. I speak for brother and self. We are here as trustees for the wife and children. Excuse me, Harry! You are not in a state to judge of my motives. But that I respect your filial feelings, my dear nephew, I would say more."

Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, perceiving by the countenance of Colonel Hamilton that he was disposed to resent this churlishness on the part of Mrs. Hamlyn's wealthy brothers, fancied they were serving their own cause, if not their client's, in endeavouring to shake the resolution of Harrington Brothers, by representing the pressure on Hamlyn's house to be temporary and accidental; and that, with a little assistance from without, he firm would be able not only to weather the storm, but take its stand with additional credit from this demonstration of strength in the moneyed world. But, even after this appeal, the brothers-in-law and stockbroker remained mute as fishes. It was clear that they, at least, thought otherwise.

"Meanwhile," cried Henry Hamlyn, suddenly withdrawing the clasped hands with which he had concealed his face, "nothing is done—and my father's credit is at stake, the fruit of twenty years' undeviating integrity and unwearied labour! He must not only die in the prime of life, but die humiliated and disgraced!"

Andrew Harrington uttered not a syllable; but his brother Thomas was troubled with a short, dry cough, which appeared of evil omen to the anxious Spilsby, whose hope of assistance from what were called the friends of the house was becoming gradually extinguished.

"Were there time to call around us my father's friends and colleagues," persisted Harry; "or had I only a dozen hours before me, I should feel safe. But if those on whom we have the claims of blood—"

"I tell ye what!" interrupted Colonel Hamilton, laying his hand graspingly on Harry's arm to forestall words of fruitless exacerbation, but himself addressing the party assembled round the table, "I am myself nowise akin to Richard Hamlyn, and no otherwise interested in his welfare than as from friend to friend. But in *my* view, that's a holier bond than many folks are disposed to admit; and so, I'm willing to stand the gist of what others are startled at. I've a matter of about two hundred thousand pounds, say two hundred thousand, in various securities lodged with the house, most of them tangible; and all I can say is, that the firm is perfectly at liberty to convert as much of them into money for its own purposes as will carry it safely through the storm."

A murmur of gratitude and admiration burst from the solicitors, stockbrokers, and clerk, wholly indifferent to Colonel Hamilton; who had his ample reward in the silent pressure of the hand bestowed upon him by his own and Ellen's young friend, Harry. But he could not but notice, at the same time, that Andrew Harrington and his brother regarded him with a look of the same contemptuous pity they would have bestowed upon a patient escaped from a lunatic asylum.

"We must lose no time," said the stockbroker, looking at his watch—we have brought it to half past seven! I shall be extremely happy to accommodate the firm with twenty thousand, on the responsibility and receipt of Colonel Hamilton, as I fear there would be no time for the realization of the securities to which he alludes—"

"Or if deposited with me," said the other friend of the house, who proved to be an extensive Russia merchant, under considerable obligations to the house of Hamlyn and Co., "I shall be happy to advance their full amount."

"You allude, I conclude sir," said Spilsby, whose countenance ever since the hostile declarations of the two Harringtons had been subsiding from pale to paler, "to the sum of £84,742 and a fraction, standing in the 3 per cent. consols, in the joint names of yourself and Mr. Hamlyn?"

"To that—to my Long Annuities—India Bonds—and other matters. But I suppose the money in the funds is most come-at-able!" said

the colonel. "This gentleman I understand to be the broker of the firm? Let him conclude the sale, bring me the necessary papers, and I will sign them before I leave the house."

And while Wigwell and Slack proceeded to murmur all the best-sounding nouns in their vocabulary nearest related to the cardinal virtues, such as "liberality—generosity—disinterestedness—nobleness—magnanimity—friendship—worth"—Spilsby busied himself, or affected to busy himself, with careful examination of a folio marked in white on a red ground with a stupendous H——; and a variety of day-books, stock-receipts, and miscellaneous papers, that seemed to bear reference to Colonel Hamilton's account with the house. At length, after prodigious rustlings and shufflings, and opening and shutting of tin boxes, the baldheaded clerk summoned the stockbroker into a corner, and commenced a whispered dialogue, which one or two of those present seemed inclined to resent as a lapse of confidence. It did not, however, last long. With a face of ashy paleness and quivering lips, Spilsby returned to the table which the others had not quitted; and, after muttering an unintelligible preamble concerning his own regrets and horror on the occasion, stated that he had reason to believe the stock in question was not forthcoming; that his friend Mr. Slicem, to whom he had just referred, perfectly well remembered having at divers times disposed for Mr. Hamlyn of large portions of the stock in question, which, at the last sale, had dwindled to a few thousands.

"And yet, strange and melancholy to say," pursued the clerk, "no entry of these sales appears to have been carried to Colonel Hamilton's account!"

"I feared as much!" was the whispered ejaculation of Andrew Harrington to his brother.

"I had, perhaps, better take this opportunity of stating," resumed Spilsby with blanched lips, "that the course of examination into the private accounts of the firm in which I have passed the night, gives me reason to fear that other securities of a similar nature will prove deficient."

"Sell my stock?—dispose of my property?" murmured Colonel Hamilton. "Well, 'tis my own fault! I gave him free leave."

"The sooner this question is cleared up, the better!" cried Andrew Harrington. "In half an hour, either this house must open, or suspend its payments. The point of embezzlement or non-embezzlement had best be premonitorily cleared up. Mr. Spilsby can ascertain from Colonel Hamilton's account the nature of the securities which ought, in *his* instance, to be in deposite. If missing—"

The baldheaded clerk interrupted the somewhat severe schooling of Mr. Harrington, by addressing in a low voice to Colonel Hamilton a succession of inquiries to which answers were returned aloud by the veteran, with irrepressible exclamations of surprise.

"Gone?" cried he. "The India Bonds sold? The Spanish too? In short, I am to look on myself as a ruined man!"

Spilsby had not courage to meet the eyes of the old soldier; still less, to utter a syllable in reply.

"Well, well!" cried he. "At all events, Moonjee's remittances are at present on the high seas. Thanks be to Providence, I may still find butter to my bread! And to think that the friend in whom I confided as in my Maker should have done this! The Lord forgive him! But the unfortunate fellow is at least making heavy atonement!"

The stockbroker, who, at Spilsby's suggestion, had hurried home to his office in Birchin Lane to consult his books respecting the transactions in question, now reappeared, breathless and agitated, with confirmation of their worst suspicions, as well as of others privately communicated to him by Spilsby.

"There's a terrible press without, awaiting the opening of the doors," said he. "I had nearly my coat torn off by people applying to me for information, as to one connected with the business of the house. All I could say at all satisfactory was, that there appeared every probability of Hamlyn's recovery. But it was not *that* they cared for!"

"I see no use in attempting to keep up the farce!" said Andrew Harrington, in a determined voice. "My nephew having left the room, poor fellow, I state at once my opinion, that to open the house for the despatch of business is wholly out of the question. It is impossible to surmise to what amount the credit of Hamlyn may be compromised. The fact is, that the firm was involved at the old man's death. Ever since, instead of retrieving himself by self-denial and economy, Richard Hamlyn has been plunging deeper and deeper into the mire, and attempting to cut through the knot of his difficulties by mad and unjustifiable speculations. *My* remonstrances on the subject produced enmity between us; and Heaven knows it is no satisfaction to *me* that all my predictions concerning my unfortunate sister's family have so speedily come to pass!"

No one interrupted him. Colonel Hamilton was gone in search of Harry, whom he found exhausted by anguish of mind ensuing on want of rest and nourishment, half fainting on one of the chests in the compting-house. The solicitors were consulting together in what shape to ensure priority of payment to their claims upon the firm; and it was only the stockbroker and Russia merchant who remained with Spilsby to coincide in the decision of the Harringtons, that circulars should be instantly printed, announcing the temporary closing of the house of Hamlyn and Co., on account of the precarious condition of the acting partner and the absence of the junior!

Mr. Slicem undertook to have this form, which was hastily drawn up by Spilsby under Andrew Harrington's directions, conveyed to the parties who undertake the printing and dissemination of such documents. But, as he quitted the house, and attempted to make his way down the door-steps, which were as densely crowded as the entrance to a theatre previous to opening the doors, a carriage and four dashed along the street, and drew up as near the door as the gathering of the mob would allow.

The crest upon the travelling-carriage was noticed. In a moment, it was whispered, and in the next, positively known, that the hasty traveller was no other than the junior partner of Hamlyn's firm; and, as it opportunely occurred to the stockbroker that his arrival might produce some modification in the paper he carried in his pocket, he applied to the policemen previously keeping order in that tumultuous assemblage to facilitate his passage through the crowd.

When, therefore, Bernard Hamlyn, an en-

feebled, fractious invalid, was assisted out of his carriage by a stout, burly individual, whom some concluded to be his valet de chambre, and some, with more truth, his country attorney (but who at present looked exceedingly like his keeper), he was conveyed into the banking-house between two policemen, giving him very much the air of a delinquent in custody, greatly to the increase of his natural nervousness and incompetency.

Bernard Hamlyn was a meager, feeble, undersized man, having hair and eyelashes the colour and texture of silk, and a voice like a broken pan-pipe.

"I received your letter by express late last night, gentlemen," said he, fretfully addressing the persons he found assembled in the private room; "*why* you have summoned me here I cannot guess. I am very unequal to the execution of such a journey—*very* unequal indeed. It is well known that I have never interfered in the concerns of this house—that I am very unequal to business—*very* unequal indeed! All I have to ask, therefore, is that you will communicate your wishes as speedily as possible to this gentleman, my legal adviser, who will act in concert with you—to which effort I am very unequal—*very* unequal indeed!"

From this preamble, it was pretty clear that the junior partner brought no accession of counsel to the consultation; and it was soon equally apparent that the means of the selfish hypochondriac were as shallow as his wit. His whole fortune was embarked in the firm; and the country attorney, his esquire of the body (if he possessed a body), who evidently came prepared to bluster and protect the egotism of his employer from molestation and his fortune from risk, was soon compelled to knock under, and announce to Bernard Hamlyn, on the showing of his shrewder brother lawyers, Wigwell and Slack, that he was nearer a fiat of bankruptcy in reality than he fancied himself to be to his grave.

"It is very hard that I should be routed out of my quiet country retirement to listen to such harassing details as these!" faltered the man, who had hitherto conceived the business of a banker to consist in receiving quarterly an income of six thousand a year. "I am very unequal to such a shock—*very* unequal indeed. I am a sad invalid—a very sad invalid. My medical attendant assured me that this hurried journey might have a most serious effect upon a man in my state of health."

But no one gave ear to his peevish grumblings; not even the burly attorney. Each man present was intent upon his own grievous share in the calamity, against which there was no farther hope of succour. Each was calculating the amount of his impending losses; with the exception of Colonel Hamilton, who exerted himself to remove the still half insensible Henry from the spot, ere the posting of the placard should announce the closing of the house.

The poor old porter was sobbing helpless behind the door as they passed. The aspect of the despairing countenances and ferocious eyes that met Colonel Hamilton's view in the throng without, as the policeman assisted them into their hackney-coach, had not faded from his recollection, even when, after a slow return towards the West End, they reached the inauspicious purlieus of Cavendish Square.

On entering the coach, the old man had taken the arm of the unresisting Henry under his, and kept his hand fondly clasped within his own, till they approached together the "house no more his home." Not a token of consciousness or recognition escaped the heart-broken young man! Colonel Hamilton was forced to assist him from the coach, as he would have assisted the helplessness of a child.

So thoroughly absorbed was he, indeed, by the alarming state of exhaustion of his young friend, and so bewildered by the exciting scenes which had been passing before his eyes, that he took no note of the aspect of the servants who met him on the door-steps. Even when Johnston addressed him in the hall, the deplorable condition of the fine young fellow leaning upon his arm was more to the colonel than any tidings he could have to learn of improvement in the wounded man.

He led him into the study, as though the house were his own and poor Harry a visiter, and placed him silently on the sofa. At that moment, Mrs. Hamilton, who had been watching anxiously for their arrival, in the earnestness of her desire to see them ere they went up stairs, hurried into the room.

On perceiving Colonel Hamilton leaning over the half fainting Henry, she beckoned him towards her, and would fain have spoken. But the kind old soul, whose eyes were obscured by gathering tears, forestalled the question he fancied her about to ask.

"Yes! all is over, Nelly!" said he. "The house has stopped payment. Go to him! Say a kind word to him. The poor fellow has no longer a guinea in the world—"

Ere he could add another syllable, Ellen was beside the scarcely conscious young man—taking his hands into hers, pressing them to her lips, her eyes, rather with the wild tenderness of a mother who finds a lost child restored to her, than the shamefacedness of a mistress or sober affection of a wife.

"Mine forever!" whispered she, with streaming eyes, as she pressed him to her heart. "*Ours* forever!" she repeated, turning towards Colonel Hamilton, who had advanced towards them, and was contemplating with deep feeling the fervent nature betrayed at such a moment by the woman he had always seen so cold, so haughty, so reserved.

Taking their united hands in his, the old man murmured a fervent blessing on their heads. And then, for the first time since he became aware of the family dishonour, the tears of Henry Hamlyn burst forth.

Alas! he knew not yet one half his cause for sorrow! The motive of Ellen's impatience to meet them by the way was only to soften by due preparation the announcement of a new calamity.

During their absence in the city, Mr. Hamlyn had breathed his last!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"My youth hath acted
Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length
By varied pleasures—sweetened in the mixture,
But tragical in the issue. Beauty, pomp,
With every sensuality our giddiness
Doth frame an idol, are inconstant friends
When any troubled passion makes us halt
On the unguarded castle of the mind."—FORD.

As the unnatural composure produced by the administration of strong opiates subsided, the

wounded man had exhibited symptoms of restlessness and irritability which produced considerable alarm in the mind of his attendant. Within half an hour of Colonel Hamilton's departure for the city, he had judged it necessary to send for the eminent surgeons to whose higher judgment his patient had been intrusted.

Scarcely was this precautionary measure taken, when Hamlyn himself seemed conscious of a change. His eyes kept wandering round, as if in search of some unseen object; and when told, on inquiring for Walter, that his son was dozing on the sofa, at the foot of his bed, he suddenly asked for Henry. With the sort of clairvoyance that appears to invest somnambulists and dying persons, he seemed to have become inexplicably aware of Harry's arrival in town during the night.

The reply of Ramsay, though expressly intended to restore his master to composure, was, unluckily, calculated only to stimulate the fever of his frame.

"Mr. Henry and Colonel Hamilton are gone to Lombard-street, sir!" said the butler, in his usual deferential tone.

"The head-clerk was here late last night; and the colonel desired he might be called at seven, to be at the banking-house before opening time."

A sudden shivering fit seemed to pervade the frame of his unfortunate master at this intelligence.

"They are *gone?* You are quite sure that they are gone, at the summons of Spilsby?" said he, in an unnatural hoarse voice.

"Quite sure, sir! Mr. Henry spent half an hour by your bedside in the night; and very much afflicted and broken he looked, when he stepped into the coach with Colonel Hamilton."

A moan escaped the lips of the banker, as his head sunk back upon the pillow on hearing these words; and when Ramsay bent over him to hold the usual restoratives to his nostrils, he saw that a cold dew was rising on the livid face.

"Call Walter!" said his master, faintly.

"Captain Hamlyn is still asleep," replied Ramsay, remembering his master's former anxious injunction that his son should on no account be disturbed.

"Call him—or it will be too late!" persisted Mr. Hamlyn; and in another moment, poor Walter, roused from one of those dreams of love and peace with which some evil influence seems to delight in mocking the anguish of the unhappy —the condemned felon in his cell—the exile in his banishment—was standing beside the bed of death.

"Nearer!" said Mr. Hamlyn, as the young man, still imperfectly awakened, stood bewildered at his side.

"Stoop down to me, Walter! Listen to me, my son! I am going where there must be an end to human love!" faltered the dying man, contemplating with fixed and glazing eyes the fine face now bending over him in unspeakable anguish. "Walter! do not curse me when I am gone! I have loved you very dearly! Do not think too hardly of your poor father!"

"My dearest, dearest father, let me call for help!" exclaimed his son, perceiving that his end was indeed drawing near. "Surely you will see my mother—my sisters? There is yet time, if you desire spiritual consolation—"

"I desire only *you!*" replied the dying man. "It is too late for repentance, Walter—too late even for explanation. But the grave covers all! My life has been a mistake—beginning in error, ending in crime! My father was a spendthrift. He left me only a ruined business—an embarrassed estate! I loved him living—I loved his memory—I tried to preserve it from shame, even at the expense of— Walter! when you hear me condemned—think leniently of one who adored *you* even as he had adored his father! Think leniently of me. Protect your mother —the best, the most exemplary of women. Do your utmost to conceal from the world the disordered state of the banking-house. But above —above all—think—think le—niently—of—" His utterance became more and more impeded. Yet, by a sudden effort, as if roused by the tears that fell profusely from the eyes of Captain Hamlyn, he put forth his hand, already cold with the approach of death, and, drawing down the face of his son towards him, imprinted a fervent kiss—the first since childhood—upon his lips!

As he relinquished his hold, his head fell back heavily on the pillow, his eyes fixed eagerly and searchingly upon those of Captain Hamlyn, and were never afterward withdrawn. In a moment a strange, gurgling sound was audible in his throat. Blood, mingled with foam, burst from his lips; and though his eyes still remained riveted on those of his son, there was no longer meaning in their glassy gaze. Already they were fixed in death!

Before the arrival of the surgeons, who had been sent for, all was over; and their countenances in quitting the house forestalled the necessity for announcement to those without of the fatal event. The afflicting news had been cautiously revealed to Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughters by Mrs. Hamilton, previous to the colonel's arrival; and while Ellen was lavishing her gentle words and endearments upon Henry, Walter was striving to support the courage of his mother sufficiently to enable her to enter the chamber of death, to which she proposed to accompany the poor girls, who yearned to look for the last time upon their father's face.

A similar feeling soon suggested itself to poor Harry, even amid the consolations so precious to his heart; and Colonel Hamilton lent him his arm to the door of the room, but forbore to enter, feeling that, at so sacred a moment, the kindred of the dead ought to be alone with their dead.

When Henry entered, the three broken-hearted women were on their knees in prayer around the bed. Walter was standing beside his mother, with his tearful eyes fixed like hers upon the now powerless form and passionless face, instinct but a few hours before with vigour, intellect, command; and the moment the door opened, the two brothers, thus meeting for the first time since their calamity, rushed instinctively into each other's arms, and clung to each other weeping, as if tacitly expressing a pledge and promise of strengthened fraternal love. Neither of them had, at that moment, a thought or care that was not comprised in the senseless form before them, and the sorrowing women at their feet. Worldly poverty and worldly shame were mere words to their ear, in the presence of their dead father; and while all London was ringing with the ruin and wretchedness of the Hamlyns, they were united in that little chamber, taking no thought of silver or gold, and willing to squander the wealth of the world, had it been placed at their disposal, to restore animation to

him who lay extended on that bloodstained bed—the victim of one of those privileged assassinations authorized by the customs of the civilized world.

Nevertheless, it was the sight of those helpless sisters and mother that served to restore to poor Henry a sense of their terrible situation. It was necessary his mother should be warned—it was indispensable his brother should be apprized that they were penniless and disgraced, as well as bereft of husband and father. To himself, at present, the worst part of the evil was fortunately unknown. He still believed the firm to have sunk under the pressure of sudden and undeserved difficulties; and in communicating the fatal tidings to Walter, repeated, again and again, "Thank Heaven, *he* was spared the knowledge of what has happened! A man of *his* strict integrity and nice sense of honour would have died in agony indeed, if aware of the discredit about to attach itself to his name!"

The two young men were, fortunately, relieved from the painful duty of informing their beloved mother of the unsuspected aggravation of her misfortunes. The instant her brothers became aware of the event which had taken place in Cavendish Square, both hastened to her side, with entreaties that she would quit the house with her family, and accept a home with either. But of this removal she would not hear. So long as the breathless form of their father remained there, she felt it to be the abiding-place of her children; and on her expressing this feeling firmly and strongly, Mr. Harrington, with as much delicacy as was consistent with his straightforward habits of life, apprized her of the doubly melancholy position in which they were placed.

That instant she desired to be left alone with her brothers. She did not choose that her innocent girls, still less that her noble-minded sons, should hear the terrible question she was about to ask, and to ask with fear and trembling, under the roof still sheltering the worthless clay of him who was gone to his dread account. The house had stopped payment; it was a misfortune—but she and hers could work—she and hers could want. All she desired to know was whether that misfortune were connected with crime! Hamlyn and Co. were insolvents, bankrupts, ruined, lost; but—she had not courage, in the end, to pronounce the fatal question!

But her compassionate brother understood her; and attempted, as best he might, to soften the blow he was compelled to deal in narrating the startling discoveries which had taken place. As if such griefs *were* to be palliated! Say what he might, the fact was before her in all its damning atrocity. *She* knew all that the honest man before her must be feeling; or, rather, she knew it *not*, for the moment she fully understood that knavery of the blackest kind was attributed to the father of her children, she sank into utter insensibility, securing her from farther anguish.

In this state she was resigned by her sympathizing brother to the care of Mrs. Hamilton, who was taking on herself towards them the care and responsibility becoming an adopted daughter of the house; and while Ellen, Lydia, and Miss Creswell placed her in bed, and tendered all the aid available to one whose soul is crushed to the dust by accumulated misfortune, the Harringtons and Colonel Hamilton entered into deliberate discussion of the farther steps necessary to be taken for the family. An inquest must, of course, be held on the body of Mr. Hamlyn; and Andrew Harrington insisted upon placing in the hands of Walter a considerable sum for the immediate needs of the establishment.

Little accustomed to receive pecuniary favours, and still less disposed to receive them from his well-thinking but harshly-spoken uncle, Captain Hamlyn was about to reject the offer, when Andrew Harrington interrupted him.

"You have no right to trifle with the destinies of your mother, my dear nephew!" said he. "Henceforward, the responsibilities of a family man are on your shoulders; and the sooner you accustom yourself to the idea that nothing now belongs to you in this house, the better. These are afflicting words, Walter; but you will expose yourself to bitterer mortifications than any you are likely to meet at the hands of a kinsman who loves you, unless you make up your mind at once to the just decree which apportions all you have been accustomed to consider your own to the creditors of your father's estate. It is on this account I would fain have my poor Sophia and her girls safely and respectably lodged under my roof."

Satisfied that reflection would convey a better lesson to the bewildered young man than all his exhortations, the sturdy but good-hearted merchant now left him to himself; but scarcely had he quitted the house, when Walter was exposed to new and equally kind solicitations from another quarter.

"I have insisted upon the privilege of family connexion to intrude upon you, my dear Captain Hamlyn," said Lady Rotherwood, who chose to accompany her nephew on his next return to the house. "I am come in the name of my sister, who cannot altogether intrust her message to Dartford; and poor Geraldine is so ill, so nervous, so overwhelmed by the misfortune that has befallen her poor child, as to be incapable of leaving the house. She has begged me, therefore, to express a hope that your mother and the girls will take shelter in her quiet house from the distressing scenes that await them here. To dear Lydia she feels almost entitled. But she has a heart and home for them all, if you will prevail on Mrs. Hamlyn to regard her and the rest of us in the affectionate light in which we wish to be considered."

Lord Dartford now broke in with entreaties to his friend to comply with the wishes of the marchioness; and Walter, who saw they were fully aware of the ruin of his unfortunate family, felt deeply impressed by their prompt and generous renewal of attentions towards the *widow of the bankrupt!* Very little, however, did he suspect the full amount of their generosity. Very little did he conjecture that flying rumours had already reached even the Marchioness of Dartford (with the hundreds of Flimflams vibrating about in London clubs and London society—the flash notes in general circulation—where and how speedily will not rumours extend?) that Hamlyn the banker had escaped by his untimely end not only the shame of bankruptcy, but the rigour of the law. Already the words fraud and embezzlement connected themselves with his dishonoured name!

"It is quite impossible for Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughters to remain here, my dear Walter!" exclaimed Lord Dartford: "still less would it be advisable for them to remove to Dean Park.

If they will not give my mother the happiness of receiving them in town, at least prevail on them to consider Dartford Hall their own. *There* they would be quite alone, quite unmolested, quite independent. *There* the indulgence of their grief would be undisturbed. I scarcely know how to say it, but it is necessary for me to add, that a thousand pounds have been paid by our banker, in Mrs. Hamlyn's name, to a credit at Drummond's."

These generous offers were received by Walter with due acknowledgment, but with an entreaty that the sun might go down on their grief ere any future measures were determined. For the whole family rest was indispensable. Early on the morrow the inquest was to be held, which was to decide whether propitiatory victims were to be offered up to the memory on which, at that moment, execrations were being heaped from every quarter; and Captain Hamlyn was convinced that, till the remains of his father were consigned to the grave, the widow would remain faithful to her post of duty.

While the affliction of the family was thus surrounded with deferential regard, the outcries against the baseness and hypocrisy of the fraudulent bankrupt became not only deep, but loud. He had deceived everybody—he had abused the confidence of everybody—and friend and foe were alike involved in his ruin. The blow of the failure of Hamlyn and Co. had a stirring effect in the city. If *they* were insecure, who was solid? If the painstaking, virtuous, exemplary Hamlyn was a knave, whose honesty was to be trusted? More than one banking-house, of the highest reputation, had cause to rue the discoveries of that day!

But amid the disregarded clamours and lamentations of the injured cliency of the house, those more immediately connected with it were among its bitterest, because most capable, assailants. The first document secured by Spilsby, in his search during the night preceding Richard Hamlyn's decease, was the fatal paper whose signature was so compromising to himself; and this once committed to the flames, he felt re-established in the security of innocence, and privileged to purchase his own indemnity by zeal in detecting the delinquencies of his late employer, and fervour in pointing them out. From the peculiarities of the case, it was decided that the bankruptcy of the firm could not be too speedily legalized; and before the grave had closed over Richard Hamlyn, the Gazette completed the publicity which the details of the inquest had imparted to his ruin and disgrace.

The columns of the daily papers now teemed with anecdotes of his crimes and misdemeanors. It was the interest of the Vernon family, and the friends of the still more deeply-implicated offender by whose hand he had fallen, to clothe his name and cause with all the infamy of which both were only too susceptible; and already the memory of the man who for so many years had been esteemed without spot or blemish, was loaded with all the disgrace of a commercial swindler and political adventurer, whose disastrous end was, in fact, mere matter of retribution.

There was something almost fiendish, meanwhile, in the malignant care with which Spilsby, and his advisers Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, contrived to place the frauds and embezzlements of Hamlyn in the clearest light. Though, till the first meeting of creditors, there was no need to publish the particulars of the funds abstracted and securities misapplied, the newspapers were soon in possession of circumstances that could only have emanated from authority; and not a private paper, not a secret memorandum, of the man so cautious in his frauds that his very shadow was scarcely admitted to participation in the mystery, but was now a matter for advertisement on all the walls and palings of the metropolis, to augment the sale of the Sunday papers!

Such is the shortsighted cunning of the crafty—such the hollowness of dishonest ostentation! The errors committed by Richard Hamlyn, the crimes perpetrated by the banker, had originated solely in a desire to create in the eyes of the world a false seeming of opulence and dignity. And now, not a huckster within twenty miles of Dean Park—not an apprentice in the city of London—but was aware to a fraction of the amount to which old Walter Hamlyn had been involved at his death, and of the annual thousands abstracted by him from the property of his constituents, to enable him to give costly dinner-parties—figure at royal entertainments—and maintain in the history of the shire of Warwick the factitious consequence of "Hamlyn of Dean Park."

The man of iron will was already mocked and derided in his shroud by the puppets he had despised—the man of immaculate virtue recognised as a knave—the man of exquisite dissembling unmasked, that all might point the finger at his detection! The very beggar at the crossing in Lombard-street, who had been wont to profit by his pharisaical almsgiving, would not for worlds have exchanged the memory of *his* life of mud and rags, hunger and cold, for that of the man of purple and fine linen, who had dipped in the dish with princes of the blood—fattened on the good things of this world—commanded the cheers of Parliament—the esteem of his fellow-citizens—and the confidence of dupes to the amount of hundreds of thousands!

The person who had most to suffer from the weight of obloquy heaped on the memory of Hamlyn, during the first few days succeeding his decease, was Lord Dartford. Walter and Henry were confined to the house, almost to their bed, and care was taken by the servants that no newspapers reached the hands of either. But the marquis, though the greater portion of his time was spent in Cavendish Square, could neither turn a disregardful eye to the statements that met him at every corner, nor a deaf ear to the entreaties of his uncle Lord Crawley, that he would seriously consider to what extent his honour was pledged, ere he degraded the unblemished name of his family by connexion with that of one of the most consummate villains of modern times.

"I should be a still greater villain myself, if, for a moment, I confounded my affianced wife or my future brothers-in-law with one who is a disgrace to the country!" replied the marquis, with indignation. "On the contrary, I am only in hopes my mother will accelerate the period fixed by herself for my marriage, in order to redeem my dearest Lydia the sooner from a name that so ill becomes her. The first thing she did on hearing her father's insolvency was to release me from my engagement. Were she aware of the odious circumstances connected with it, I verily believe that excess of delicacy would inspire her with the determination never to become

my wife. Be assured, therefore, my dear uncle, that, with all due deference to your authority, nothing will be left undone on my part to hasten the solemnization of our marriage."

This generous resolution did not, however, prevent him from being hourly molested by some new proof of Hamlyn's coldblooded hypocrisy, or some fresh instance of the distress occasioned in private life by his fraudulent transactions. Lord Dartford literally trembled at the idea of what his friend Walter might have to undergo when he emerged from his present retirement. Already he had announced his intention of leaving his regiment; the six thousand pounds he would receive for his troop constituting, for the future, his sole provision in life.

At present, however, the whole attention of the young man was absorbed by the instructions of the two Harringtons concerning the administration of the bankrupt's estate, and their painful duty towards those denounced by the finding of the Inquest, as the WILFUL MURDERERS of their father!

The first bitter lesson imparted to the two young men concerning the dishonour which had befallen them in the person of the deceased regarded the interment of his remains. To the widow had been referred the question concerning the spot, selected in his lifetime by Mr. Hamlyn, for his last resting-place; when both Walter and Henry eagerly forestalled her answer by naming the family-vault at Ovington, which contained the ashes of their grandfather.

"I should almost have advised," was Andrew Harrington's remark on this suggestion, "that he were buried quietly in town. Under the circumstances of the case, the less observation provoked, the better. If you abide by my opinion, you will consign your father to the grave, in the most private manner, at Kensal Green. It would be a deep humiliation to all of you were any painful demonstration of public feeling to occur at the funeral."

Mrs. Hamlyn was silent—Walter indignant—Henry surprised. A memorandum in the handwriting of the deceased, found shortly afterward, having, however, expressly stipulated his place of interment by his father's side, even the Harringtons (who, much as they despised and condemned the conduct of Hamlyn, admitted his filial piety to have been beyond all praise) coincided in Walter's desire that his wishes, on this point, should be strictly respected.

Orders were accordingly issued for the opening of the family-vault; and then it was the Hamlyns became first aware of a heart-rending visitation consequent upon the recent event in Lombard-street, which the kindly interposition of Colonel Hamilton had preserved from their knowledge. The amiable wife of the good vicar, startled into a premature confinement by the tidings, indiscreetly communicated, of Mr. Hamlyn's death and bankruptcy, had fallen a sacrifice to the shock of knowing the inheritance of her children, and the savings of her poor, to be involved in the common ruin. On the second day, fever had come on; and in the height of her delirium, calling upon the grasping banker to render back the widow's mite, the orphan's pittance, the solace of the aged, the bread of the hungry, which he had plundered to gild the waste of his ostentation, the exemplary protectress of Ovington had given up the ghost!

In order to qualify the letter addressed by Walter to Dr. Markham concerning the burial of him who had been the means of laying his wife in the grave, Mrs. Hamilton judged it indispensable to communicate this mournful intelligence to the family.

Still, the hearts of the young men were too full of their father and his last wishes not to persevere. Their letter was addressed to Jacob Durdan, as churchwarden of the parish, instead of the afflicted vicar; while the immediate answer of the former was addressed to his respected neighbour, Colonel Hamilton, rather than to the children of him whom he regarded as little better than a common thief.

"If I might make so bold, your honour," wrote the farmer, who had given practical proof that *he*, at least, understood the meaning of the word honesty, "I would ask you to recommend the family at Dean Park (whom I should think little enough on if they hadn't the luck to call you friend) not by no means to think of bringing down the body of the late Mr. Hamlyn to Ovington Church. I wouldn't answer for the consequence, sir! I wouldn't answer for what insults might be offered to the corpse. We're decent folks hereabouts, your honour, and noways given to show disrespect to the dead. But I do believe, as I'm a Christian man, that the coffin would be torn to pieces by the populace! It isn't only, sir, for the Savings' Banks, and Loan Societies, and Benefit Societies, as he robbed so shamefully, or the poor firesides he deprived of their hope and comfort, by carrying off the little they'd scraped together by the labour of a long life. It isn't only that, sir! But your honour do know how the vicar is respected among us, and what Madam Markham was to the poor folks hereabouts. And after seeing that dear lady carried to her grave, sir, with the coffin of her innocent babe by her side, and not a dry eye in the parish from the thought that 'twas the ruin of her poor children that cut short her useful, valuable days—after *that*, your honour, to see that swindling hypocrite brought down among us with all the pomp of mourning coaches and sable feathers, would be apt to exasperate the villagers beyond what's safe.

"I humbly hope, colonel, you won't attribute this letter to any anger because of my being put to the cost of deeds for the sale of my farm, to no purpose in the world. Only if you'd be pleased, sir, to apprize the young gentlemen (again whom nobody bears an ill-will for what's no fault of theirs), you'd do 'em a real service, and a kindness to your humble servant to command,

"JACOB DURDAN."

Such was the first intimation to the young Hamlyns of the abhorrence in which the memory of their father was likely to be held! The lesson was a cruel one; but there is no rebelling against such instruction. Already, the proud spirit of Walter was completely broken by the varied humiliations arising out of the recent events; and when he returned from laying the head of his father in an obscure corner of one of the metropolitan cemeteries, and saw his mother and sisters profit by the dusk of evening to quit forever the gorgeous mansion, the remote origin of so much of their present misery, he felt that the glory of his days was departed. The hateful position in which Alberic Vernon stood towards him, rendered every tenderer feeling connected with that family a source of bitterness. *He* had no consolations—no, not one! His trust had been in the world—his delight in

its pomps and vanities. Out of the vortex of London, he had never framed a wish or indulged an ambition. And what was to become of him, now that society was closed against him—the giddy pleasures of vanity suppressed—the aspiring hopes of vaulting ambition blighted forever?

If upon Henry the blow had fallen with a less withering influence, it was because the weight was lessened by the participation of an affectionate heart—it was because the wound was envenomed by the ill blood of selfish vanity. Henry Hamlyn was deeply humiliated by the shame which had fallen upon his father's house, and the discoveries which withdrew from his veneration the memory he would have delighted to honour. But while the darkness of his prospects was lightened by the contemplative and unworldly frame of his mind, the turpitude of his father was in some degree extenuated by the moderation arising from a more extended philosophy. To *his* view, a portion of the crime was chargeable upon the vices of our social institutions and the corruption of a degenerate age.

"But for the idle emulation of my grandfather with Lord Vernon, arising out of an indefinite state of society and confusion of classes," argued he, "my father would have remained a thrifty, frugal, laborious man of business. To my father, the old man bequeathed the choice between exposing his prodigality to shame, or keeping up the farce of pretended opulence and competition with the great. The task of dissimulation once begun, in deference to the faults and follies of his parents—what so easy—what so gradual—as the sloping ways of duplicity? In the rash attempt to retrieve his fortunes and those of his clients by desperate speculations, he lost all sense of moral obligation. And how excitingly did the cheers of society and fawning of interested dependants stimulate his progress! Who cared to examine the sources of the opulence that conduced to their pleasures or ministered to their advantage? Moreover, and above all, if his command of money were acquired by unlawful means, his application of it was not wholly unworthy. If he took from the poor, he gave to the poor. His charities were boundless—his acts of generosity exemplary. But, alas! alas!" was again and again the concluding reflection of the sorrowing young man, "that ever I should be forced to have recourse to sophistry to palliate the errors of my once-loved, once-respected father! I remember the time when it would have been accounted, from one end of the city to the other, the vilest of calumnies to attribute so much as a lapse of discretion to Hamlyn the banker!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"Close up his eyes—for we are sinners all!"
SHAKSPEARE.

Among those who suffered most, and with most self-command, throughout these sad reverses, was Colonel Hamilton. Unblinded, like the young Hamlyns, by the instincts of nature in his appreciation of the conduct of him who was gone, he experienced all the natural imbitterment of feeling arising from consciousness of being duped by those in whom we have placed the trust of friendship. A great gap, moreover, was suddenly created in his existence. He had lost his counsellor—his hand-in-hand companion—his friend—and without even the comfort of bestowing a regret on his memory!

Nevertheless, his sentiments on the occasion were characteristic of all the disinterestedness and tenderness of his character. He lamented his loss of fortune chiefly as the diminution of his means of contributing to the happiness of his fellow-creatures; and, instead of bewailing himself, after Lord Vernon's fashion, as the most ill-used of mankind in being thus treacherously stripped of the major part of a fortune which he had been toiling his whole life long in banishment and self-denial to scrape together, he was never weary of thanking Heaven for the interposition which had detained so large a portion of his funds in India till the day of peril was over, and invested a lesser one in the house in Portland Place.

"Consider, my dearest Nelly," said he to his daughter-in-law, "that, had that fatal question been brought before Parliament only three weeks later, the consignment from the Bombay Company would have fallen into Hamlyn's hands, and been swallowed up with the rest! Reflect, my dear, what it would have been to have been reduced to absolute beggary—we, and the poor Johnstons and all! 'Tisn't for myself; for I could have made my way to Ghazerapore, and found welcome and work from my old Rajah, and laid my bones there as well as elsewhere. For me and Pincher don't want for much in this world, and sha'n't want even that much longer. But you, my poor dear child, whom I've taken so much pride and pleasure in filling with hopes of being prosperous and happy, you wouldn't have borne Indy, Nelly! For all you're so fond of the warmth of Italy, you couldn't have stood the climate of Ghazerapore. And even if you could, think what 'twould have been to Harry, poor fellow, to find you brought to such misery, and know it was occasioned by the iniquity of his father! So you see, my dear, 'twas Heaven's own mercy that Moonjee was so slow in fulfilling his engagements!"

Poor Ellen submitted to congratulate him, as he seemed to desire, on the loss of his two hundred thousand pounds; and secretly blessed the 'tis-well-it's-no-worse philosophy which so thoroughly reconciled him to a stroke of adversity that would not only have driven any other man to despair, but perhaps tempted him to visit upon the son the crime of the ungrateful sire!

"Heaven knows, my dear, 'twould be sinful were *we* to repine, so well off as we are, when others are suffering so much more severely! There's poor Miss Creswell, who had been looking forward to comfort and competence, left without a shilling, and life to begin again, just as she had earned the privilege of rest. There's that worthy Dr. Grantham, Quiddle was telling us of yesterday, with his large family of children, and his paralytic stroke. There's that wretched widow woman, who got hold of me by the arm the day I was coming away from Lombard-street with Harry, and talked about Hamlyn's obligations to her poor dear dead and gone John Darley, and that she should be turned out of the stable-yard where she'd bided for forty years. There's Sir Robert Maitland, whom I myself betrayed into the scrape; and, above all, there's poor, dear Markham, so broken-hearted, yet so resigned; with the children crying round his knees for their mother, who, were he to die to-morrow, would, maybe, be crying for bread! As to those poor souls at Ovington—oh! Nelly,

Nelly! The more I think of it all, the more I feel that I cannot be sufficiently grateful to Providence for such a mitigation of my lot, and the power of yielding them some assistance!"

Another person who drank with submission the bitter lees of the chalice of humiliation presented to her lips, was the banker's unfortunate widow. In the comfort afforded by the succourable hand extended towards her children by the brothers who, through life, had held apart from her husband, and in the unaltered affection of young Dartford for her beloved daughter, she found unlooked-for alleviations.

From the first hour of their tribulation, she perceived, by the care with which on all occasions the marquis chose to identify himself with Walter and Henry in their filial endeavours, that his intentions were unchanged by all that had occurred or might occur. And when, at the close of a month's mourning, he pressed for her consent to an immediate marriage, under the sanction of his whole family, Mrs. Hamlyn indulged in pious feelings of gratitude to Heaven for the tranquil destiny thus provided for her daughter, without a single grovelling idea or self-degradation. Conscious of the generosity of Dartford's conduct, she felt that it could meet with no richer reward than the affection of such a heart as Lydia's; and, in according the credit due to the young lover, did equal justice to the merits of her child.

It was from the house of her worthy uncle that Lydia went forth, in soberness and tranquillity, without so much as laying aside her mourning attire, to become the bride of one of the first nobles in the realm. In scarcely any other spot would she have found courage to leave her mother at such a moment. But the house of Andrew Harrington was one in which Mrs. Hamlyn could abide without a painful sense of dependance. He was a widower. His only child, a daughter some years younger than Harriet, not only adored her cousins, but was eminently benefited by Miss Creswell's sojourn under her father's roof; and towards his sister, the blunt merchant was uniformly and tenderly scrupulous in moderating his expressions and mollifying his deportment. She had no difficulty in perceiving that, if Walter had no severer Mentor, he had also not a truer friend on earth, than his uncle Andrew.

"For that young man, Sophy," he would sometimes say to his sister, "all that has happened is for the best. The break-up was just in time. He was not *quite* spoiled—was spared the evil which I am assured awaited him of having a silly, useless, expensive doll of a wife upon his hands—and has learned the value of worldly friendships and the hollowness of fashionable life. A few more years to take the nonsense quite out of him, and I don't desire better than to have him for a son-in-law. Little Sophy will take a couple of hundred thousands or so to the man who chooses to call himself Harrington for her sake (as good a name as Hamlyn, as I fear you've found out to your cost!); and it will be your own fault, my dearest sister, if you do not, in the interim, make my poor neglected girl all you can wish in a daughter-in-law!"

An interruption shortly occurred, however, in the attentions of the aunt, the lessons of the governess, and the delight which Sophy Harrington was beginning to take in the society of her cousins. Soon after the Marchioness of Dartford was settled in her new home, her beloved mother was beset with the warmest invitations.

"You would not hear of a visit to Dartford Hall at my husband's entreaty!" wrote Lydia; "will you persist, dearest of mothers, in your refusal to myself? I am not half happy here, till I have you and Harriet under my roof."

And when the dearest of mothers arrived in Shropshire, she found that one of those miracles which prove that wealth can sometimes be a blessing had been wrought in her behalf! Such a cottage—surrounded by such a garden—and furnished with such elegant simplicity as never cottage was furnished before—had been completed for her use! Furniture, plate, linen, books, not only marked with her name, but chosen with such careful and tender deference for all her tastes and occupations! Not a flower, not an author that she loved, but was there to greet her; and though nothing could be more unpretending than the little snuggery, it was so well distributed as to contain everything and everybody; Harriet's and Miss Creswell's room adjoining her mother's; and not only dens for Walter and Henry, but pleasant spare chambers for Colonel Hamilton and Ellen, whenever they could be prevailed upon to join the family party at Dartford Hall.

At present, they seemed riveted to the manor. The first removal to Burlington from town was a severe effort to the poor colonel. He had scarcely courage to pass the lodge-gates of Dean Park, and almost as little to survey from his library-windows the Braxham woods overhanging the Hyde.

"Nevertheless, disagreeable as it all is, my dear, and painfully as I am haunted, which ever way I turn, by reminiscences of poor Hamlyn and his dear wife and girls, I feel it my duty to be here. The place is mine for the next twenty years; and if I don't abide in't, who *will*? Luckily, the means are left me. I can't keep it up in quite the style I intended, but we may live here decently, Nelly, and pay our way. I must look sharper after Robson, and *you* be a bit of a hous'ife (if Goody Johnston will let you). For you see, my dear, Ovington has lost everything in losing Dean Park (which mayn't find a purchaser for ages, considering the difficulties about the title), to say nothing of poor dear Madam Markham, who'll never find a substitute while the world stands; and this, without considering the ruin wrought in every house within twenty miles round by that sinful bankruptcy! So if you and I were to absent ourselves, and the village to lose the profit of the manor being inhabited, in addition to all the rest, I should feel that we had much to answer for!"

It sometimes puzzled the good colonel to determine how matters would be arranged as regarded this determination to reside at Burlington, when the period arrived for Henry, who was completing his studies at Cambridge in compliance with the desire of his uncles, to fulfil his engagements with the "beautiful Ellen," in compliance with his own—in a spot so hateful to his feelings from its vicinity to Dean Park. For, with all Mrs. Hamilton's grateful affection for her untrustworthy father-in-law, she still persisted in her bad habit of keeping her little love affairs a secret from him; and had never afforded him a hint either that the word of Lord Crawley and interest of the six Elvaston votes was pledged to procure an appointment abroad

for him whom the hints of Lady Devereux and the tact of Lord Edward Sutton readily pointed out to the family at Ormeau as his successful rival; or that she and Harry had already agreed to spend the first two months after taking his degree in happy companionship with her under the roof of his kind mother, who had already taken the stump of myrtle under her protection, and placed a bracket in her little drawing-room to support Gibson's beautiful bust of Diana.

But if Ellen left the good old gentleman thus fairly in the basket, it was only because she was forming ulterior projects of happiness for himself, which, prematurely to announce, would have been assuredly to mar. Moreover, Mrs. Hamilton was not without hopes that the winding-up of Sir Roger Burlington's affairs, which was taking place in the hands of a Master in Chancery, in consequence of the death of the trustee, might enable Lady Burlington to return to England and bring up her son on his paternal estates; in which case, nothing would be easier or more agreeable to Colonel Hamilton than to cancel the lease.

The most painful trial, meanwhile, experienced by Ellen and the good colonel, among the many that awaited them on their return into Warwickshire, was their first interview with the vicar. Mortifications they bore without wincing. The impertinent self-consequence of Barlow of Alderham, who forced himself upon them in a morning visit, for the sole purpose of chanting his Pæans, that the man by whom the county had been disgraced, and the funds of its hospital and lunatic asylum plundered, did not belong to one of "the old county families," was a thing to smile at; and the ill-repressed exultation of Gratwycke of Gratwycke House at the certainty that, henceforth, *his* donations to the Warwickshire charities would be first in magnitude on the list, a thing for christianly compassion. But it *was* a severe ordeal to walk through that miserable viliage—that village, whose almshouses and infirmary were now closely shuttered up—that village, whose rags had been taxed and whose barley-loaves rendered scant to swell the profusion of the base impostor who had so long pretended to act as its benefactor—to the humble but once cheerful vicarage, whose household gods that hollow-hearted guest of princes and haranguer of senates, Hamlyn the banker, had stamped irretrievably into dust!

"I wish to the Lord o' Mercy the meeting was over, Nelly!" faltered the colonel, as they entered the well-known swing-gate and the little garden, now weedy and disordered from neglect. "I can't bear the thoughts of seeing her chair empty and those poor little ones in their black frocks. Well! she's in a better place! If any one can be sure of salvation, 'tis such a meek and self-denying soul as *she* was. Nelly! I wish the meeting was over!"

It was a great relief to the old gentleman to find that Dr. Markham had just stepped across the fields to Durdan's farm. But Ellen, aware how much it had cost them both to prepare for entering the house, was resolved that the benefit of the effort should not be lost. Besides, she had some little presents in her pocket which she had brought from town for the children; and after asking to have them brought into the parlour, walked boldly in. As the colonel had foretold, it was sad work to look upon the vacant chair and formal, tidy room; in comparison with the litter of the old work-table, on which clothes for the poor were always in progress, or the children's spelling-books, with their dogs' ears, lying about as if they had a right to be there. Ellen would have given much but to have seen a skein of silk or ball of cotton on the carpet. She had not felt so heart-bound since she abided under the same roof with the unburied body of the banker.

Nor were her feelings much relieved when little Kitty made her appearance—hiding her now shy face—led in by the nurse too happy in having a new visiter to whom she could relate the oft-told tale of her poor dear angel of a dead-and-gone mistress's sufferings; and how, if there was a God in heaven, Hamlyn, the banker, would be brought to eternal punishment!

"She never held up her head after the news, ma'am!" said she, while the colonel turned away to the window, pretending not to hear, but in reality to conceal his emotion. "The poor babe, ma'am, was still-born—never stirred, the doctor said, from the moment of its poor mother's hearing of Squire Hamlin's having made away with himself. And at last, ma'am, when the fever and delirrum com' on, 'twas the most affecting thing as ever was heard, how the poor dear soul kept talking of the ruined families in the village, one by one—how poor old Parsons would have no coals or blankets this winter for his rheumatism—and what the carpenter's orphans would do—and such like; and then, bursting out a-singing, all as one as she was in the organ-loft; and never did her poor voice sound finer nor more sweet than only half an hour afore she died—and master's hand in hers, begging her to compose herself, and not sing so—and *she* laughing outright, and then, a prayer, and then, flying off to Mary Haines, the poor 'oman as went up for a cancer from Ovington to the county Hospital; and at last, another hymn, as clear and sweet as a nightingale! Everybody present said it was the song of the angels!"

"She *is* an angel, Mrs. Smith!" cried the colonel, turning abruptly round—"an angel with God!"

And the poor nurse, whose face was already covered with her apron, sobbed only the louder for that assurance.

"If you'd but ha' heard the poor dear children a-calling after their mamma, sir, those first two or three days!" said she; "I'm sure I thought poor master would ha' gone distracted! Not that he's much better now, sir. Look here!" continued the good woman, opening the door of a little vestibule that led to the vicarage-garden, and pointing to a bonnet and shawl that were hanging up, which Ellen recognised from having hundreds of times met poor Mrs. Markham arrayed in them, when fulfilling her errands of charity in the village. "Master won't hear of these being taken down, ma'am! though it goes to everybody's heart to see 'em still hanging there. I got up betimes, one morning, afore he was astir, and moved 'em, and thought he'd never miss 'em. Bless you, sir! as he came through the hall to read morning prayers, he saw at a glance they was gone, and know'd nobody'd dare to touch 'em but me. So, 'Smith!' said he, 'let those things be instantly replaced!' And them as ever heard master speak in *that* tone, sir, know there's to be no reply. So I went and fetched 'em on the instant, with tears in my eyes. And ever since, ma'am, I've noticed that when poor folks out of the village

comes to ask for assistance (and since Hamlyn's failure master's obliged to think *twice* about granting it, where he didn't used to think *once!*), the first thing as ever he does is to glance up at that poor shawl and bonnet; as much as to say, if *she* was still here, my poor people, you wouldn't have been forced to come here to *ask* for help! But GOD's will be done!"

At the close of this mournful narrative, Ellen, who was petting poor little Kitty upon her knee, found that her own tears were stealing down the little white shoulder of the child; whose usual spirits were gone, and who, now left wholly to servants, seemed frightened rather than pleased by the endearments of a *lady*—a lady who was not mamma! She looked up wistfully into the face that was weeping over her; for, to a child, tears are synonymous with pain, punishment, offence; and for a month past, nothing else had met her little saddened eyes.

At that moment the vicar passed the window rapidly, and entered the room to welcome his unexpected guests. He was thin, haggard, pale —but made an effort to meet them with a smile —that he might not seem the only one unable to adopt his prescribed submission of "GOD's will be done!"

But the poor child allowed him no time for his intended welcome. Extending her little arms towards him, as though she had at last found a friend, she exclaimed, with imperfect utterance, "Take me home, dear papa—I want to go home—I want to go home!"

"You *are* at home, my darling—hush, hush! you *are* at home," whispered the poor father, pressing her to his heart.

"No, no! Kitty wants to go home!" reiterated the child, in a plaintive, piteous voice. And though that mournful cry was unintelligible to the ears of the Hamiltons, it wrung the heart of the poor vicar; who, on the day of his wife's funeral, ere the stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre, had been rash enough to take his infant in his arms, and, accompanied by his sobbing boys, show them the last resting-place of their mother; so that, in after-life, they might know where that holy woman was laid—and how her coffin had been scattered over with precious herbs by the hands of the poor—the poor whom she had comforted—the poor whom she had fed; a tribute how worthy to efface the sprinkling of dust to dust, wherewith the forms of the Church symbolically degrade our dead!

But the impression of this spectacle on the younger child had been most injurious. While the elder ones, with more extended knowledge, recoiled from the idea of darkness and the tomb, the younger, the tender infant, accustomed to nestle in its mother's bosom, knew only that mamma was sleeping there—that before her lay her tender, patient, loving, thoughtful mother. Thenceforward, she had no home elsewhere! The vicarage was empty, her nursery a desert, the parlour silent, lonely, comfortless; even her father no longer the kind, happy papa of better days. The child was right. She wanted her mother. Where a mother is, is always *home!*

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We owe it, however, to the patience of our readers to turn a brighter page at parting, and enable them to forget the sufferings of the banker's wife in the consolations of the banker's widow. Surrounded by her prosperous children and beautiful grandchildren, and on the eve of witnessing the happy marriage of her younger girl with Lord Edward Sutton, to the sincere satisfaction of the amiable family at Ormeau, Mrs. Hamlyn retains all her former angelic serenity—all her humble trust in the protection of that Providence, by whom, for its own wise purposes, her earlier days were chastened with affliction. Though her friend, Lady Burlington, is happily established at the manor, she has never found courage to revisit the neighbourhood; nor, though their mutual friends for a moment anticipated the probability of a nearer connexion between the gentle Sophia and the frank old soldier, to whom she has ever been the object of devoted regard, has she ever sufficiently relaxed from her grave reserve of widowhood, to encourage him to the risk of losing a friend by an attempt to convert her into a wife.

Henry's children, meanwhile, are General Hamilton's heirs; nor were they or Ellen less dear to the affections of the excellent mother-in-law, than the noble boys of Lord and Lady Dartford, or the fairy girl of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Harrington.

To repair the evils occasioned by the misdoings of the head of the family has been, of course, impossible. But it is noticed that the habits of both Walter and Henry are frugality itself; and the aid which periodically reaches the poor of Ovington, and the alleviations received by many of the humbler sufferers by the failure of the branch of Hamlyn and Co., can only be referred to the conscientious mercy of his representatives. Moreover, even the stern brothers of Mrs. Hamlyn are beginning to foresee so favourable a return from the South American speculations as may eventually compensate the evils so wantonly created by the fraudulent banker, and afford a golden sunset to the stormy days of the virtuous and unoffending BANKER'S WIFE.

THE END.